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Springer

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ISSN 2195-1853 ISSN 2195-1861 (electronic)
China Academic Library
ISBN 978-981-15-7723-9 ISBN 978-981-15-7724-6 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6

Jointly published with Foreign Language Teaching and Research Publishing Co., Ltd
The print edition is not for sale in China (Mainland). Customers from China (Mainland) please order the print book from: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Publishing Co., Ltd.

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The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

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Part I
Semio-Narratology

Chapter 1
Redefining Sign/Symbol and Semiotics

1.1 What Is a Sign?

Why should we invest so much effort in redefining the term *sign*? One reason is that its Chinese counterpart *Fuhao* is abused to an intolerable extent in daily usage of the Chinese language today. We often see sentences such as, "This has only the significance of a sign" (implying "no viable meaning"); "Simple GDP ranking is only a sign" (implying "no substance"); "She has not the sign of an artist" (implying that "she keeps a low profile and works diligently"); or "For them, Confucius has become a sign" (implying "an empty icon"). Even well-educated people use *sign* in this manner and if we do not make diligent efforts to contain this popular misuse, *sign* is in danger of becoming synonymous with "insignificance," and semiotics with "drawing-room chitchat."

The misuse in Chinese can partly be blamed on the lack of a clear definition of the term *sign* in Western languages, to which the modern Chinese word *Fuhao* is the counterpart. In Euro-American semiotics circles (where the modern discipline of semiotics has been firmly founded), the definition of *sign* has remained very much the same as its traditional definition established in classical times, that is, "Aliquid stat pro aliquo," as attributed to St. Augustine. Although in the twentieth century, semiotics was rapidly developed by generations of scholars into a sophisticated discipline to the degree that it is often nicknamed "the Math of Cultural Studies," the definition of sign has remained unchanged. The irony is that though semioticians have been working hard to redefine terms such as culture, ideology, value, intention, cognition, et cetera, as each of these terms suffers from too many definitions, the time-honored basic term remains unchallenged.

Neither of the two founders of the discipline of semiotics, Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, felt uneasy about this millennia-old definition. Saussure sticks to the old phrasing "something standing for something else" (Saussure 1916), while Peirce attempts to expand the definition in saying that "A sign … is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity" (Peirce 1931–1958, 2–228), a definition that, in fact, adds only a receptive dimension to the original

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Y. Zhao, *The River Fans Out*, China Academic Library,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6_1

definition. We may call this the substitutional theory of sign. Its shortcomings are obvious and manifold, as this theory cannot explain why human beings cannot exist at all without substitution. Somehow, semioticians today try their best not to touch the definition despite some finding it inadequate.

Denial Chandler's *Semiotics, the Basics* has been widely used as an introductory textbook for beginners. After a lengthy discussion on the lack of a clear definition of *sign*, Chandler simply gives up: "Assuming that you are not one of those annoying people who keeps everyone waiting with your awkward question …" (Chandler 2002, Introduction). Although this is an attempt at sarcasm, it comes across more as an apologetic and embarrassed laugh. Meanwhile, David Lidov writes pages on the definition of *sign*, only to beat a retreat in the end: "Does semiotic theory even require a definition of sign? It is a commonplace that sciences require primitive terms that they do not define. Physics does not define matter, nor biology life, nor psychology mind." Lidov acknowledges, however, that this is no excuse for the failure to define *sign*, because in semiotic studies, without the definition of sign, "the ongoing dialectic of exemplification and delineation … achieves no axiomatic basis" (Bouissac 1998, 575). What is anticlimactic, however, is that Lidov then does not write another word after acknowledging the necessity of redefining *sign*.

In fact, generations of scholars have expressed their dissatisfaction with the substitutional definition, the most vocal of whom is none other than the founder of semiotics Charles Sanders Peirce himself. In his scattered notes, he often hints that there must be something underlying the substitution. He sometimes calls it an "idea": "The sign stands for something, its object. It stands for the object, not in all aspects, but in reference, to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representamen" (Peirce 1931–1958, 2–228). On other occasions, he calls it "emanation": "… every sign has, actually or virtually, what we may call a Precept of explanation according to which it is to be understood as a sort of emanation, so to speak, of its object" (CP 2–230). More often he calls it "Truth": "As we know a sign, it is something which represents the real Truth, in some aspect of it, to somebody; that is, determines a knowledge of that Truth" (Dichotomic Mathematics).

Only in his final few years did Peirce begin to use the word "meaning" to describe what is beyond the substitution, albeit hesitantly. In his 1903 essay "Foundations of Mathematics," he identified meaning with the object: "A sign is supposed to have an object or meaning" (Peirce 2019). In his 1907 essay "Pragmatism," however, meaning is the interpretant: "The two correlates of the sign have to be carefully distinguished. The former is the object of the sign; the latter is the 'meaning', or, as I usually term it, the 'interpretant', of the sign" (Peirce 2019). In my opinion, both statements are correct: the object and the interpretant could be understood as either or both of the two kinds of meaning (in other words, reference and connotations) carried by the sign.

With this understanding, Peirce tentatively rejects the substitutional definition in a letter he wrote to Victoria Welby: "I thought of a representamen as taking the place of the thing; but a sign is not a substitute. Ernst Mach has fallen into that snare" (SS 193). Thus, as his thinking evolves, Peirce's approach comes closer to a "meaning definition." The reason that gradual formation of a new "meaning definition" has been

ignored by a century of semiotic studies is that his argument is far from systematic. This, however, is no reason that his insight should have gone unnoticed.

The definition of sign is the starting point of the whole enterprise of semiotics, of which the single purpose is to ascertain how signs operate in the world of meaning. Therefore, it is imperative to find a workable definition of *sign* before any issue can be tackled properly in semiotics. Winfred Nöth acknowledged: "(The sign) has either the broader sense of a semiotic entity which unites a sign vehicle with a meaning, or it has the narrower sense of a sign vehicle only" (Nöth 1990, 79). He further explains: "the concept of sign is generally used in its broadest sense of a natural or conventional semiotic entity consisting of a *sign vehicle* connected with *meaning"* (Nöth 1990, 3). The connection of the narrow definition with the broader one emphasizes, then, that meaning is what signs are all about.

That being the case, the first question is: what is a *sign vehicle*? It appears that we require a more precise description of this term, however obvious and straightforward it may seem at first glance. As is known, Saussure calls the sign vehicle the "signifier," which, in his words, is a 'sound pattern' (*image acoustique*), whereas Peirce calls it "representamen," which is "an object perceptible, or only imaginable, or even unimaginable" (Peirce 1931–1958, 2–230), while Charles Morris defines *sign vehicle* simply as "a particular physical event or object" (Morris 1946: 96).

Must a *sign vehicle* be "physical" or an "object"? Obviously not, as it must cover such a variety of uses as mental activities ("We think only in signs" Peirce 1931–1958, 2–302), images in hallucinations, fantasies, and dreams (otherwise, why do we weep for what we have seen in a dream?), virtual data marks on a computer, and what Umberto Eco called a "blank sign," or Thomas A Sebeok "zero sign" (which is a perception of the lack of perception where there should be one). The only appropriate phrasing I could think of to cover all of the above is "a sensory entity," as suggested by Peirce.

However, in a sign relationship, this sensory entity should be united with some meaning to form a sign entity; thus, it must be "a meaning-carrying sensory entity." Since the meaning intended by the sender often fails to reach or be accepted by the receiver, a sign must be interpreted as meaning-carrying by the receiver. That is, whether something is a sign or not should be decided by how it is received, and, as such, the definition should be rephrased as "a sensory entity regarded as carrying meaning."

So far, this appears to be a nice and neat definition of *sign* that combines the sign vehicle and its meaning connection. In human culture, however, there are a large number of intentionally created objects or images that are meant to carry meaning but, for whatever reason, fail to reach the receiver; that is, they are not yet actually regarded as carrying meaning. An unsent love letter, a postage stamp tucked in a scrap pile that has never been used either by a sender or philatelist, a radio SOS signal that has never been received, or a sigh over the phone after the receiver has already hung up. All these artifacts are created through human efforts and intended to be meaning-carrying signs, but end up unrequited as they fail to reach an interpretation.

There are also signs that do reach their receiver, but the receiver fails to interpret, or even to misinterpret, or to find any interpretation that is acceptable to the receiver

himself. Such signs undeniably carry meaning, but their meaningfulness is reduced to "insignificance," as argued by Leone (2019). Among millions of other such signs, we could mention a few: listening to opera in Italian, reading Egyptian hieroglyphs before the Rosetta Stone was discovered, or a lady's meticulous make-up when a phone call cancels the party. In a sense, any interpretation is effective as it turns a sensory entity into a sign. In this function, there is no such thing as "misinterpretation," as any interpretation offered by the receiver is equally valid so far as the meaningfulness of the sign is concerned. If, however, the receiver fails to provide **any** interpretation, and the degree of meaningfulness sinks to zero, a sign is still a sign, even when it is absolutely insignificant. Otherwise, what are these entities? No one can deny that hieroglyphs, whether they have already been deciphered or remain undecipherable for now, are all valid signs.

That is why the journalists searched high and low, but to no avail, to discover the meaning of "rosebud," the last word uttered by citizen Charles Foster Kane. They continued their search because it *must* carry some meaning but the opportunity for interpretation had never arisen. If it is not a sign, what could it be and why the fuss? It is justifiable to declare it a sign since its meaning was discoverable. These are signs because they fall neatly into that category in human culture. It is definitely inappropriate to declare it *not* a sign, since it is obviously a man-made sensory entity that attempts to convey meaning, and no one can say for sure that no interpretation is available (in the past or future).

Therefore, signs in the human world should include the above-described two kinds, that is, signs unsent, or those sent but uninterpreted, for the simple reason that they are cultural products in the category of *sign,* and they enter the world for the purpose of carrying meaning. A viable definition of *sign*, therefore, must include those "failed" signs because, despite having failed so far, there is the possibility that in the future they will succeed in being regarded as meaning-carrying. Since such failed signs are apparently much more prevalent than "fulfilled" signs, we are left with no option but to rephrase our definition of *sign* as "a sensory entity to be regarded as carrying meaning."

With this broad definition of *sign*, it is all but reasonable to say that signs solely exist to carry meaning that is to be (though has not necessarily yet been) interpreted. On the other hand, no meaning can be carried, communicated, or interpreted without signs. Sign and meaning are so tightly interlocked that there is no such thing as a meaningless sign, nor is there a meaning independent of sign. That being the consensus in semiotic circles, I merely propose to add that this is also true for those sensory entities that were born to carry meaning but have failed thus far to be interpreted, for these entities accord with the new definition "a sensory entity to be regarded as carrying meaning," and the very potentiality is sufficient for them to be called signs.

Regrettably, this suggestion challenges the celebrated rule laid down by Peirce—"Nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign" (Peirce 1931–1958, 2–308). However, if an unheard sigh, an untold hallucination, an unobserved gesture, a scene hidden in memory, an unsent file lying idle in the computer, a Sanskrit line in the sutra that even the chanting monk does not understand, or an image carved on the

cave wall that is not yet discovered let alone deciphered are not signs, what could they be? Interpreted or not, they are born into the human world to carry interpretable meanings.

In this respect, Roman Jakobson's observation is more accurate than that of his predecessors when he declares, "The signans must necessarily be perceptible whereas the signatum is translatable" (Jakobson 1985, 30). Jakobson's word "translatable" is remarkably accurate as it means the capability to be translated into another sign. Jakobson does not require that a sign must be interpreted, however, and, in this paper, I am merely picking up his line of argument and pushing it to its inevitable conclusion.

1.2 *Symbol* and/or *Sign*

More confusion arises from the use of the word *symbol* either synonymously or not with *sign*. Many authors use the two alternately, causing great trouble to readers and, particularly, to translators of non-phonetic languages like Chinese. The problem lies in the fact that *symbol* has at least two distinct meanings. Since this is a commonplace that has been made extremely complicated by experts, let us here simply quote the most commonly used source, the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, rather than consulting professional sources that could make the situation more complicated than practically comprehensible. The entry *symbol* in the said dictionary reads:

> 1. A mark or character taken as the conventional sign or some object, idea, function or process, e.g. the letters standing for the chemical elements or the characters in musical notation. 2. A thing conventionally regarded as typifying, representing, or recalling something, esp. an idea or quality (*white is a symbol of purity*).

Other dictionaries follow more or less similar definitions; that is, there are two kinds of symbol: one, listed as definition 1 above, is virtually synonymous with *sign* and these terms are virtually interchangeable, perhaps having only different stylistic nuances. The other, listed as definition 2 above, is a special kind of sign, which could be an icon that represents an *état d'âme* or a sign that becomes much more suggestive than an ordinary sign through collective pragmatic use. In his *Routledge Companion to Semiotics,* Paul Cobley writes succinctly in agreement with the above-cited dictionary definitions that symbol may have two meanings: "a synonym for sign, or a special type of sign" (Cobley 2010, 339).

However, the situation in Western writing is not so clear-cut. Winfred Nöth, for instance, listed four different types of symbol (Nöth 1990, 115–120), while some other lexicographers simply skip defining this troublesome yet oft-used term (Boussaic 1998; Colapietro 1993). This linguistic headache should remain in European languages and should not infect Chinese, in which two separate words are used for the two definitions of *symbol*: *Fuhao* for *sign* and *symbol* (definition 1) and *Xiangzheng* for *symbol* (definition 2). For instance, symbolism as a movement in art and literature can be confidently translated into Chinese as *Xiangzheng Zhuyi* as the symbolism

here derives from definition 2. However, the serious challenge that Chinese translators and scholars often encounter is how to recognize the exact meaning of the word *symbol* as used on each occasion in Western scholarly works. This is partly because the Western authors themselves are not clear which *symbol* they are using, and mix the two definitions rather casually and liberally, and partly because the Chinese translators are unable to discern the exact meaning on each occasion. This is also true for Western readers, though their "ignorance" does not show up. The result is that Western scholarship has infected the Chinese scholarship, which should not have suffered this confusion in the first place, with its confusion regarding *symbol*. There are, in fact, two traps: in phonetic languages, there is a confusion regarding which definition is followed by the word "symbol" we are reading, whereas in Chinese we are confused regarding which translation should be used.

This awkward situation also exists in Japanese, whose writing system is half-phonetic. In that language, both *sign* and *symbol* used to be translated into Chinese characters pronounced in the Japanese way, *kigō* for sign and *shōchō* for symbol, and thus falling into the same translation trap (that is, either treating all symbols as definition 1, or all as definition 2). Fortunately, Japanese is a half-phonetic writing system, allowing translators to switch more or less freely to phonetic transcription, and, to avoid the headache of distinguishing the two types of symbol, they switched to a sort of alphabetic rendition of the Western word *symbol* in either of its two definitions as *sinboru*. In this way, they escaped the Chinese trap of having to decide upon the definition, but fall into the Western trap of suspending the choice of meaning.

For instance, for Ernst Cassirer's well-known saying that the human being is "animal symbolicum," the Japanese translation of the final word was first "*shōchō*" as opposed to *kigō*, subscribing to definition 2. Later, however, they switched to the phonetic rendition *sinboru*, thus adhering to the Western confusion. Meanwhile, in Chinese, *symbolicum* was first translated as *Xiangzheng* (taking definition 2) and later collectively switched to *Fuhao* (symbol as sign) after a careful distinction of what the word symbol actually means in Cassirer's context, leaving much room for argument. Such is the advantage of phonetic (e.g., Japanese) translation—it maintains the ambiguity.

Yet, the confusion in Western languages could become even more troublesome. According to Cobley, Ogden, and Richards, Cassirer's term belongs to definition 1, whereas many scholars, including Freud, Peirce, Morris, Saussure, and Bakhtin apply definition 2 (Cobley 2010, 339). In fact, not all them follow definition 2 and symbol in definition 1 has the potential to develop into symbol in definition 2, mainly through sufficient society-wide repetition of the former (e.g., the swastika for Nazism, five rings for the Olympics, or a bull for the dominance of Wall Street). So far so clear, but the problem remains that in everyday use of the language, and, more seriously, in academic or even semiotic writing, the two definitions are difficult to distinguish.

Although Ernst Cassirer's well-known description of the human being as "animal symbolicum" caused confusion in Japanese and Chinese, this was eventually settled in different ways, as described above. When it comes to his three-volume magnum opus *Die Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* (1923–29), however, uncertainty remains regarding how to translate it, as the use of the term *symbol* in the book

jumps back and forth between the two definitions, rendering translation impossible in Chinese. The same is true of Tzvetan Todorov's *Théories du symbole* (1977). Translators into any phonetic language had no choice but to stick to the phonetic transcription of symbol, whatever the definition in the text, and readers simply follow whatever spelling is given. Chinese translations must use different words after ascertaining which definition is actually used. In fact, the Western author himself might not be clear which he is actually using on each occasion. They might, intentionally or unintentionally, mix up the two. Jean-Jacques Lacan's Symbolic Order or Pierre Bourdieu's Symbolic Capital are, I would guess, actually using definition 1 as they were discussing signs that bring order, and signs changeable to financial or social benefit. Indeed, Umberto Eco commented that Lacan's "Symbolic Order" is closely connected to language, and, therefore, should be called "Semiotic Order" (Eco 1984, 203). Yet, Chinese translations of these works all use *Xiangzheng*, following definition 2, simply to make their translations more high-sounding or seemingly profound.

Peirce, for that matter, adds to the confusion by adopting the term *symbol* neither in definition 1 (synonymous to *sign*) nor in definition 2 (with connotations beyond the ordinary *sign*), but as a subgroup of *sign*. He describes his particular usage of the term in an apologetic way:

> The word Symbol has so many meanings that it would be an injury to the language to add a new one. I do not think that the signification I attach to it, that of a conventional sign, or one depending upon habit (acquired or inborn), is so much a new meaning as a return to the original meaning. (Peirce 1931–1958, 2–297)

After acknowledging that his symbol, which is in fact a "sign by convention," belongs to neither of the two definitions listed above, he excuses his aberration by saying that this is how the Greeks used it; that is to say, it is the most time-honored and accurate definition.

> In Greek, watch-fire is a "symbol," that is, a signal agreed upon; a standard or ensign is a "symbol," a watchword is a "symbol," a badge is a "symbol"; a church creed is called a "symbol," because it serves as a badge or shibboleth; a theatre ticket is called a "symbol"; any ticket or check entitling one to receive anything is a "symbol." Moreover, any expression of sentiment was called a "symbol." (Peirce 1931–1958, 2–297 †)

Most of the above-listed seven examples of "symbol" in Greek use basically adhere to Saussure's idea of sign as "arbitrary" or conventional signs, and, in his own triadic taxonomy, should comprise one subgroup of *sign* parallel to icon and index. As such, neither definition 1 (a regular sign) nor definition 2 (a connotative sign beyond the regular sign) pertain and instead, he creates symbol definition 3 (in his own words, "new meaning") of *symbol*. Regrettably, most Chinese scholars and students apply definition 2 to this type of symbol, and use the term *Xiangzheng*. This seriously increases the difficulty in reading Peirce's works in Chinese, which are by no means easy to understand in the first place.

In contrast, Ferdinand de Saussure is relatively sober regarding the usage of *symbol* and drives it wisely away from his system:

> The word *symbol* has been used to designate the linguistic sign, or more specifically, what is here called the signifier. Principle I in particular weighs against the use of this term. One characteristic of the symbol is that it is never wholly arbitrary; it is not empty, for there is the rudiment of a natural bond between the signifier and the signified. The symbol of justice, a pair of scales, could not be replaced by just any other symbol, such as a chariot." (Saussure 1983, 114).

Saussure's stand makes his works clearer though he fails to recognize that symbols of definition 1 could be synonymous with arbitrary signs (as Peirce's examples show), while symbols of definition 2 are still a kind of sign. However, his alertness against possible confusion helps to make his doctrine straightforward.

Let me provide an even more enlightening example: Semiotics, which is called *Fuhaoxue* in Chinese, was first proposed by the great Chinese linguist Y. R. Chao. In 1926, when he had just returned to China after four years of teaching philosophy at Harvard, Chao published a long essay *Fuhaoxue Dagang* (A Syllabus of Sign Studies) in the Shanghai journal *Kexue* (Science), in which he clearly states at the very beginning: "Signs have existed since ancient times, but there has been no effort whatsoever to launch a discipline to study all signs, their nature and their usage" (Chao 2002, 178). After long years in the US, at Cornell as a PhD student and lecturer, and at Harvard as professor, he would most certainly have acknowledged his indebtedness, if he had ever heard of Charles Sanders Peirce, Ferdinand de Saussure, or others working in the same trajectory, since, at that time in China, knowledge of Western scholarship was something to be proud of. He also suggests: "the English equivalents to his *Fuhaoxue* could be *symbolics, symbology or symbolology*" (Chao 2002, 179). Therefore, his term *Fuhaoxue* was not a translation, but should be considered the fifth name independently suggested for the discipline, after Welby's *significs*, Saussure's *semiology*, Peirce's *semiotics,* and Ogden-Richards' *Science of Symbolism.* One thing is for sure, however, from the very beginning of the development of this discipline, Chinese scholars realized that *symbol* should, in many cases, be understood as synonymous with regular sign, but not with the special type "connotative sign" of definition 2, which should be translated as *Xiangzheng*.

Some scholars argue regarding whether symbol is the genus with sign as a specie. Umberto Eco wrote "Either the symbol is the semiotic genus of which all the other semiotic phenomena are species, signs included, or there is a semiotic genus called 'signs' of which symbols are one among the species" (Eco 2011, 1049). The latter is certainly a more sensible suggestion, although the name of the genus should be sign/symbol definition 1, while definitions 2 and 3 are species.

1.3 Definition of Semiotics

The discussion above regarding *sign/symbol* leads, unavoidably, to a reconsideration of the definition of semiotics. Generally speaking, all definitions of semiotics are variations of the same formula: "Semiotics is the study of signs." Saussure defined his semiology as a discipline that "would investigate the nature of signs and the

laws governing them" (Saussure 1983, 15). He also called the discipline "a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life" (Saussure 1983, 16). The modifier "social life" is a superfluous limitation he imposes upon himself, as signs can often be used inter-personally or intra-personally. Peirce, without knowing Saussure's definition, offers a similar definition of semiotics as "the quasi-necessary, or formal, doctrine of signs" (Peirce 1931–1958, 2–227) where the modifiers are also unnecessary. Such a definition is, in fact, a cyclical one, using a word of Greek-root *semeon* to define its Latin-root equivalent *sign* (signum). However, this definition, with its predicate virtually repeating its subject, fails to explain anything.

Later semioticians follow more or less in the same vein, only adding this or that modifier. The definition offered by Umberto Eco, for instance, goes as follows: "Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign" (Eco 1976, 7), while Morris's definition is taut, "the science of signs" (Morris 1938, 1). Thus, all these efforts boil down to the century-old definition: "Semiotics is the study of the sign." Recently, some efforts have shifted to a new phrasing "study of semiosis," or even to a particular length "Semiotics can amount to syntactic, semantic, or pragmatic properties of the sign" (Pelz 2011, 927), all of which are only variations of the old formula. After reinstating a similar definition, Paul Cobley immediately follows with the caveat that the definition itself is "not appropriate for getting this book started" (Cobley 2010, 3).

If, as this paper has been painstakingly discussing, we could establish that signs are locked to meanings, and that there can be no sign that does not carry meaning, or no meaning that is not carried by a sign, what naturally follows is the question: why cannot semiotics be understood as "the study of meaning," as a natural step after the "meaning definition" of sign?

This is not a new idea proposed by this paper, as quite a number of semioticians have made extremely similar statements in the last century. In their seminal work *The Meaning of Meaning*, C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards suggested that the most viable definition of meaning is "That which is actually related to a sign by a chosen relation" (Ogden and Richards 1943, p. 186). In another chapter ("Sign-Situations") of the same book, the authors propose that *symbolism* is "the theory of meaning dependent upon the theory of signs" (Ogden and Richards 1943, p.xvi). The two are actually conjugated. Their definitions have recently been echoed by scholars such as Daniel Chandler, who suggests: "(Contemporary semioticians) study how meanings are made … since we make meanings through our creation and interpretation of signs" (Chandler 2002, 2, 13). Jerzy Pelc also declares "characteristics of all kinds of applied semiotics is that they strive to uncover the meaning of the investigated reality" (Pelc 2011, 932). In 2009 Goran Sonesson proposed in clear terms, "I am quite willing to redefine semiotics as the science of meaning" (Sonesson 2009, 210).

To cut to the chase, "semiotics is the study of meaning" could be a straightforward definition for the discipline. Why, then, has it not been widely accepted as a clear definition of semiotics? I surmise that there is hardly an equivalent *meaning* in other major European academic languages. French has *sens* and *significance,* German has *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, whereas in English there are three words (*sense, significance*, and *meaning*). While each set of terms can cover the whole area of linguistic

denotations in its own language, the jigsaw pieces cut out by these words hardly overlap, with the English word *meaning* notably isolated. Thus, attempts to match these words are terrible messy, no matter how basic they are in modern philosophy. Though Frege's term *Bedeutung* has from the outset been translated into English as *meaning*, the argument has never abated for more than a century. In 1970, the renowned scholarly publisher Blackwell held a symposium devoted solely to the translation of Bedeutung, but despite the intense debate, no conclusion was reached. Finally, a vote was called and it was decided, by compromise but not by consensus, that *meaning* is the English equivalent for *Bedeutung* (Beaney 1997, 36–46). That being the case, it became more difficult to reinstate the above-mentioned definition in a straightforward manner in German or French. For a similar reason, A. J. Greimas' book *Du Sens* has been rendered into English as *On Meaning* (Greimas 1974), not using the English word *sense.* Apparently, the word *meaning* could be the common denominator if other nations were to adopt it, but this is not possible as the boundary of our words is that of our thoughts.

Nevertheless, in English, the matter remains complicated enough. Clive Bell's celebrated motto of "Significant Form" could actually be "Meaningful Form." Victoria Welby's book *Sensifics,* which begins with the idea of *sense*, is actually discussing perceptions and meaning, but she realized the inherent inconvenience and later called her doctrine *significs.* Her succinct summary "The sense of sign follows the sign of sense" (Petrilli 2009, 109) shows what the core idea of her thinking is, as indicated by another of her well-known book titles *What Is Meaning?* The polysemy of this set of synonyms of the most basic term *meaning* makes it difficult to fix the definition of semiotics.

Another reason might be more important in deterring the definition of semiotics as the study of meaning. Many modern disciplines also take meaning as their core issue, notably hermeneutics, phenomenology, semantics, as well as the two time-honored traditional disciplines—logic and rhetoric.

Many scholars used to share the idea that the study of meaning is split into two parts, with semiotics covering the making and sending of meaning and hermeneutics its receiving and interpreting. Bronwen and Rinham claim that the emphasis of semiotics is on signification, that is the "articulated meaning" (Bronwen and Rinham 2006, 119). Alfred Whitehead, the celebrated philosopher, declares that human beings seek signs in order to express themselves, and, in fact, "the expression itself is sign" (Whitehead 1928, 62). Michel Foucault's explanation in his *An Archeology of Human Sciences* is perhaps most explicit: We could call the way in which the signs "speak" and develop meaning hermeneutics, and all the knowledge for the distinguishing and ascertaining of what turns a sign into a sign, and understanding its connecting rules, semiology (Foucault 2002, 33). This idea persists even today, as Anne Henault opens her book with a similar definition: "la sémiotique est avant tout l'étude du rapport d'expression" (Henault 2002, 1).

This division of labor, however, no longer holds water as it was mostly based on the Saussurean conception of semiology. Peircean semiotics, particularly after Eco's revamping, is often called interpretive semiotics, as its emphasis has shifted from

signification to interpretation. Hermeneutics, with its long tradition, still stands but many of its concerns are shared by semiotics, and the two disciplines are mutually supportive.

The difference between phenomenology and semiotics lies more in how meaning arises and transmits. Edmond Husserl and other phenomenologists devote large parts of their work to the emergence of meaning. In their works, signs only enter when the formed meaning must be expressed or communicated. This differs considerably from Peirce, who, in his effort to construct his "paneroscopy," claims that "we think only in signs" (Peirce 1931–1958, 2–302); that is, signs come into being right at the beginning of meaning emerging in our mind, not after the meaning has been formed. However, Peirce only mentions Husserl twice,both casually,in his voluminous notes and shows no evidence of actually having read Husserl (Peirce 1931–1958, 1–7; 8–189), despite Spiegelberg's insistence that Peirce knew Husserl's ideas well (Speigelberg 1998, 52). Thus, according to him, there could not be any budding meaning that is not yet carried by signs.

Space limitations prevent us from indulging in a detailed comparison between the "meaning theory" of semiotics and other disciplines. We can only briefly state that since semantics has been developed from a branch of linguistics to one of semiotics, the former has no monopoly on the study of meaning. Logic and rhetoric are the two disciplines from which Peirce developed his semiotics; their resources and some core ideas had already been appropriated into semiotics. However, logic deals with reasoning and proving, while semiotics deals with all kinds of meaning activities, in most cases decided by cultural conventions or human comprehension, which are hardly rational. Rhetoric is the discipline of how speeches and writings can be made more effective and persuasive, which inspired Peirce in his development of semiotics, but the latter covers a much wider range of meaning-making than rhetoric figures could cover.

In summary, from the discussions above, we could say that semiotics attempts to explain the formal aspects of all meaning-making, meaning-communication, and meaning-interpretation, conducted by signs, thus becoming the most comprehensive study of meaning, though it does not replace any of those disciplines. We could say that all the above-mentioned movements and disciplines have been part of what Richard Rorty later called "The Linguistic Turn" of modern thinking (Rorty 1992) and therefore they are mutually supportive and often converge in dealing with difficult issues. Since we cannot deny that these disciplines also take "meaning" as their core concept, we could try a safer and less inclusive definition: "Semiotics is the study of sign-conducted meaning activities." However, semiotics studies meaning in its most fundamental sense and all aspects with which meaning is concerned, while the other disciplines emphasize one or other aspects of the study of meaning. However, since we are sure that the sign is locked onto meaning, "Semiotics is the study of meaning" stands as a definition.

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Chapter 2
The Fate of Semiotics in China

2.1 Bumpy Road for Formal Studies

In recent years, *fuhao* (sign) has become a buzz word in Chinese cultural life, which itself has been undergoing rapid transformation, from a more or less pre-modern society not long ago to a highly hybridized one with salient post-modernistic characteristics. Cultural studies is a natural academic response to this rapid change, and has lead to the flourishing of semiotics. Although semiotics is not new to China, the development of the discipline in the last decade is still highly impressive. What has emerged in China today could be called a fever of interest in semiotics. *Zhuoyue Net* (the Chinese branch of Amazon) lists more than 200 new books on *fuhao* or *fuhao xue* (semiotics), mostly published in the last five years. Using Baidu (the dominant search engine in China), one can find 2.75 million items for "semiotics" (whereas "narratology," which also had prospered in China, reaches 0.6 million items, less than one fourth).

Semiotics could be regarded as the contemporary crystallization of more than a century of formalism. It is, nevertheless, a long and rocky road that formalism has taken to arrive in China. Traditional Chinese philosophy and literary criticism hardly favored the formal way of thinking. During the so-called Pre-Qin Period of Hundred Schools Contending (eighth to third centuries B.C.), there was once a flourishing *Mingxue* (the Study of Naming), which was criticized by other schools as indulging in trivial argument. The School was soon marginalized and reduced to curious historical relics when Confucianist political ethics was canonized as the official philosophy in the second century B.C. During the many centuries in which the various sects of Buddhism gradually infiltrated China, the *Vijnaimarataiddhi* Sect (Wei Shi Zong) with its origin in *Hetuvidya*, the Indian school of logic, failed to win a grip on Chinese imagination, even though the Sect was promoted by the greatest Chinese Buddhist scholar Xuanzang and supported by some emperors in the Tang Dynasty. During the early years of the twentieth century, when modern formalist thought was mushrooming in Europe and America, China was undergoing a drastic cultural modernization—the May Fourth Movement—during which Chinese intelligentsia

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Y. Zhao, *The River Fans Out*, China Academic Library,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6_2

embraced all kinds of Western ideas. Yet the reception of formalism was lukewarm compared with other more totalizing doctrines that looked more "useful."

There was one factor, however, that sowed the seeds of formalism on the Chinese soil despite all the disadvantages: two of the most well-known "New Critics" I. A. Richards and William Empson, who found traditional Chinese philosophy in tune with their doctrine (Richards, Ogden, and Wood 1922; Richards 1930). They stayed and taught in Chinese universities for many years, and their love of China generated enthusiasm in their Chinese colleagues and students. Their works began to be translated into Chinese as early as mid-1930s. Some of the English poets closely associated with them—notably, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound (Zhao 2006, 2006: 265–290), and W. H. Auden (Zhao, 2006: 211–215)—exercised a powerful influence on modern Chinese poetry. Those seeds would eventually be awakened when the cultural climate turned favorable.

2.2 The Rise of Semiotics in China

The Chinese interest in formalism in the 1930s, not altogether discouraging, was soon to be interrupted. World War II started formerly in China as early as 1937, to be followed by a civil war. In the ensuing forty years, literature in China was dominated by Socialist Realism, and formalist thoughts were considered dangerously decadent and "Bourgeois" in nature. Students were totally cut off from any information. When Saussure and Peirce were being "discovered" in the West in the 1960s and 1970s, China failed to notice the noise at all.

The long period of freezing finally came to an end, and a thaw gradually set in after the so-called Cultural Revolution had been ended. In 1978, when I joined the first batch of post-graduate students in China, my mentor Professor Bian Zhilin, who was once a colleague of William Empson during War II (Zhao, 2006: 170–177), encouraged me to study formalism systematically, and, first of all, tackle the New Criticism. It was no surprise that, among all the formalist schools, the New Criticism was first re-introduced into China and, therefore, exercised belated but disproportionate impact on Chinese cultural life during the thaw of the early 1980s. Other schools—the Russian Formalists, the Prague School, and structuralist semiotics—soon followed into China. In the year of 1985, the *annus mirabilis* of Chinese literature, there appeared a "fever of methods" (*fangfa re*) and formalism received a warm welcome. Once art and literature was no longer considered a "mirror image of reality," a method besides mere content-gazing was needed, and formalism was found to be the most consistent and operative among all methods. Many scholars, especially those of the younger generations, subscribed to it with the excitement of staging a rebellion, which was made more exciting by the hot debate on "formalism versus realism" whipped up by the old guards of literary theory.

The passion with which both camps threw themselves into the debate was, regrettably, short-lived, as they were both burned into a political zeal. The paradox was that, despite the fact that it is often considered not sufficiently political in the West,

formalism was considered as a clear political stance in China all along, as it leads to the neutralization of the dogma of literature "educating the people." After the disastrous clash of the old and the new by the end of 1980s and their mutual annihilation, China went into a frenzied economic take-off and Chinese academia was rapidly depoliticized. The fortune of formalism/semiotics in China in the last twenty years has not been as sensational as it was in the 1980s, and its attraction has been limited within the university campuses, with its methodological side rather than its ideological side emphasized.

The progress, however, has been quiet but more rapid, due largely to two factors.

Since the mid-1990s, China has been the world's leading book-printing country, publishing more than 200,000 titles every year, which means that every day there are more than five hundreds new titles published. Almost all of the important works by noted Western theorists have been translated. With such a huge literature built up in Chinese, young scholars in China are generally Well-read and their knowledge quite up to date.

Meanwhile, Chinese higher education has been hurriedly expanding. In the mid-1990s, one million new students would be admitted into universities and colleges each year, whereas in 2009, five million youngsters would be admitted, with the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) reaching twenty-three percent. Considering China's huge population, the GFR that might not be so surprising in itself actually means a staggering number of university students. Both the numbers of the students and of the higher education institutions are now among the highest in the world. In fact, higher education in China has become an additional mass education. That creates a gigantic demand for academic books and teachers. The quality of the translations as well as the teacher-training courses offered in Chinese universities presently might not be that satisfactory, as could be imagined. But what counts more is the practical need for training teachers in literary and cultural theories, and, therefore, semiotics is now urgently needed.

This pedagogical demand, along with the increasing self-confidence China has gained through its economic success, finally gave semiotics the opportunity to rise in China. It is against this background that both the shortcomings and the hope of semiotics in China should be understood.

2.3 The Success of Narratology

Within the whole trend, narratology, the more developed branch of modern formalism/semiotics, has been making vigorous progress. International conferences, crowded with eager young scholars, have been repeatedly held in China in the last decade. The Chinese narratologists soon began to shake off "classical narratology," in order to meet the popular demand in an age when, more drastically than the rest of the world, China has been turned into a nation of film and TV drama watchers. The enthusiasm on the part of Chinese scholars to catch up with the "new narratology" or "narratologies beyond literary criticism" has helped the Chinese literary circle

making the "visual turn." Shen Dan of Peking University has exercised a great influence in joining Chinese efforts with those of the West in promoting new narratology (Shen 2004). Fu Xiuyan of Jiangxi Normal University is among those who have made the greatest contributions to the new discipline (Fu 1999).

Another ostensible feature in the development of narratology in China is the emergence of the "Chinese narratology." Refusing to follow the Western terminology, some scholars endeavor to resurrect and systematize traditional Chinese criticism of the novel, the so-called "marginalia criticism." There are some technical stimuli for this drive: the linguistic particularities in the Chinese language make the discussion of time, subjectivity, reported speech, etc., in Euro-American narratology less relevant to Chinese fiction. The guiding principle behind the movement is, however, somewhat "post-colonialist," as it attempts to conduct an "equal East-West academic dialogue" after de-eurocentralizing narratology. Yang Yi of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences has led the pursuit (Yang 1997).

The efforts so far have been only partially successful since a radically nationalized "Chinese narratology" can hardly be translated or transmitted to the rest of the world. But if not, it remains a modern reiteration of traditional Chinese scholarship. Only some Western sinologists show interest in finding a path through the labyrinth of the purely Chinese studies of narratives. A more productive dialogue, it seems to me, can only be realized among Chinese scholars who are well-versed in both traditions. Despite that, narratology has been the most tangible result of the progress of formalism/semiotics in China in the last twenty years, and has been formally established as a discipline eagerly studied in most Chinese universities.

2.4 Linguistics as the Usher of Semiotics

Semiotics, as the summary of more than a century of formalist movement, took an indirect path into China—linguistics. In the long years of highly-politicized atmosphere in modern China, linguistics has always enjoyed the advantage of remaining a step away from political storms, thanks to no one else but Joseph Stalin, who, to conclude a debate in the Soviet Union, wrote a pamphlet in 1950 to conclude a debate in the Soviet Union, declaring "the formula on 'the class nature of language' is wrong and non-Marxist." That gave linguistics an unexpected freedom that virtually no other discipline in human sciences in China has ever enjoyed. Nevertheless, the fact that most major linguists of the twentieth century are from "capitalist countries" still made the situation complicated, and a serious study of Saussurian and Chomskian schools of linguistics did not start until the thaw close to the end of the 1970s. The Chinese edition of Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* was published in 1983, a new translation in 1996, and, after the *Troisième cours* had surfaced in the West, its Chinese translation appeared in 2001, which aroused renewed interest in him. Even today, linguistic semiotics is still the mainstay of semiotics in China. The recognized leaders in this field are Hu Zhuanglin of Peking University (Hu 2004), Wang Mingyu of Heilongjiang University in Harbin (Wang 2004), and Ding Ersu of

Lingnan University in Hong Kong (Ding 2000). Cai Shushan of Tsinghua University, on the other hand, has devoted his academic career to logic and cognitive linguistics, with impressive achievements (Cai 2007).

On the other hand, the complicated evolution of the Chinese language and its unique written characters have been a magnet that has drawn constant scholarly attention for two thousand years. In China today, there are a group of scholars dedicated to a semiotic interpretation of the history of the Chinese writing system, notably Prof. Shen Xiaolong of Fudan University in Shanghai (Shen 1995) and Meng Hua of the Ocean University in Qingdao (Meng 2008).

2.5 Particularities of Semiotics in China Today

Recent development in semiotics has been Widening its spectrum to cope with the drastic changes in Chinese culture in the last twenty years. The unexpected sudden economic boom has posed a great challenge to academia in China where even the name of cultural studies was hardly heard of not long ago. When literary critics turned their attention to culture in general, semiotics is a natural channel, and scholars in cultural studies and communication studies have resorted to semiotics en masse, making cultural studies a huge discipline in China today.

One characteristic of Chinese semiotics today is its wide range of practical applications. There have appeared in the last few years hundreds of monographs taking a semiotic approach to tackle such cultural issues as architecture, brand design, advertising, youth culture, tourism policy, urban planning, etc., in order to find a methodology to tidy up their otherwise scattered observations and discussions. Shifting from linguistics to a broader frontier of cultural studies, Chinese semiotics has been greatly helped by being practical. It is never too early, though, to warn that practicality, if not restrained, might dampen Chinese scholars' theoretical ambitions.

Interdisciplinarity is also a salient feature in Chinese semiotics, as many serious scholars whose interest has been in other schools of cultural criticism such as Marxism, existentialism, psychoanalysis, environmentalism, anthropology, feminism, etc., have moved closer to semiotics, finding it an important tool to refocus their research, since semiotics has now been widely regarded as the common denominator of human sciences.

Marxism is still the pillar in human sciences in China, although re-interpreted more or less along the lines of traditional Chinese thinking. Naturally the models set up by Western Marxists with a powerful inclination toward semiotics, such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Louis Althussser, Fredrick Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, Henri Lefevre, and others have become extremely popular in Chinese academia. Replacing economism with culturalism, and adding the discursive formation to the social formation, Marxian semiotics has laid its foundation with cultural critique its cornerstone, thus opening up a great opportunity for Chinese scholars. Zhao Xianzhang of Nanjing

University is a leading scholar in this trend (Zhao 2004). It can be expected that Chinese semiotics may make an important contribution to world semiotics in this respect.

2.6 Semiotics in China Poised to Leap

Thus, semiotics has greeted its new flourishing in China. Courses in semiotics are now offered in many universities, and research centers have been established, with a great number of monographs published every year on related topics.

Chinese scholars in semiotics have been trying to found academic organizations ever since 1988 when a small-scale forum on semiotics was chaired by Prof. Li Youzheng of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, on which some scholars from Beijing and Tianjin discussed the possibility of coordinating their efforts. The timing of the proposed forum, however, was far from optional. In 1994, a few years later, the China Language and Semiotics Association was founded, which has remained active since with six biennial conferences. The Association has a strong inclination towards linguistics, having a close link with China Cognitive Linguistics Association. Among the topic most studied in the field is translatology, since the scale of translation activities and education in China is simply massive.

However, recently there has appeared a shift from linguistic semiotics to philosophical and cultural semiotics, for which Prof. Li Youzheng has made persistent efforts during the last thirty years. His voluminous *Introduction to Theoretical Semiotics* has been a must-read among concerned Chinese scholars and students (Li 2006).

Until recently, there had been neither a center not a journal solely dedicated to semiotics in China. But now there are a number of such centers and ambitious plans. One of them is based in Nanjing Normal University where there has been a strong interest in semiotics. In April 2007, the University established an International Institute of Semiotic Studies headed by Prof. Zhang Jie, who specializes in Bakhtin-Lotman school of Russian semiotics (Zhang and Kang 2004). In November 2008, the Institute held a large-scale international conference attended by a number of noted scholars from Europe and America. A new journal in English, *Chinese Semiotic Studies*, with Gu Jiazu as its editor, is being launched to promote semiotics in China.

Another such center is the Center of Semiotics and Communication Studies founded at the Sichuan University in Chengdu, China. The Center is publishing a journal *Signs & Media* in Chinese, and a long-run translation project *Contemporary Semiotics* that publishes four books every year, with books by Eero Tarasti, John Deely, Marcel Danesi, and many others being prepared. The center's postgraduate program has also attracted a good number of students each year. The works by today's leading scholars in related fields such as Julia Kristeva, Umberto Eco, Paul Ricoeur, Pierre Bourdieu, Michael Riffaterre, and others have been systematically studied at the University, as a substantial number of young teachers and PhD students, both

on the side of cultural criticism and of communication theory, participating with tremendous zeal in the activities of the Center.

The acceleration with which semiotics has been growing in China is encouraging. Yet more could be expected from its future. It is hoped that postmodern semiotics meeting the world's longest sustained civilization could provide a great impetus to the advance of both. Some scholars insist that Chinese "semiotic thinking" dates back as early as the seventh century AD for Buddhist epistemology, or as early as the third century BC for ancient Chinese philosophy, or even much earlier if, according to their argument, *The Book of Changes* (Yi Jing, dated 3000–5000 B.C.) could be read as the world's first system of semiotic comprehension of human experience. With such a glorious history and with so many enthusiastic students and scholars, it should not be a surprise if there appears a Chinese school of semioticians with their unique contributions understood and appreciated by the rest of the world.

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Chapter 3
The Problem of Time in a General Narratology

3.1 A New Definition of the Minimal Narrative

In the past 20 years or so the Narrative Turn that has been taking place in almost all branches of the Human Sciences—in psychological treatment, in legal practice, in political campaigns, in computer game designing, etc.—is a gigantic trend which should have revolutionized narratology. It looks, however, that it has left narratology in a perplexity how to deal with the new situation. But narratology, which grew out of the analysis of the novel a century ago, has no choice but to adapt itself to the new situation.

Are narratologists today, whether they call themselves "Post-Classical", or "Pluralistic", or simply "New", willing to change accordingly so as to embrace all the Narrative Turn? Not necessarily so. David Herman wrote in his introduction to Narratologies that going beyond literary narratology is not to find a new thinking method for the basic concepts but to demonstrate how Post-Classical Narratology can draw nutrition from the peripheral fields [1].

My proposal is, to the contrary, to propose a narratological framework that could include all narratives though still keeping the novel and the cinema on our favourite playground, since they are still the most complicated narrative genres. The generalization of narratology is comparable to the turning of linguistics to semiotics which happened a century ago with Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce: its foundation must now be built on a much broader ground.

For that purpose, the foremost task is to redefine narrative so that it could cover all narratives. Such an effort, however, will have to push aside the history-honoured idea of "retrospective nature" of the narrative. James Phalen, a leader of the New Narratology, insists that narratology and futurology are two diametrically opposite disciplines: "The default time of the narrative is the past" [2], Porter Abbott also insists that the event prior to the narration is the defining condition of all narratives [3].

The narrative retrospectiveness is a principle repeatedly iterated by Western scholars since Aristotle, with which diegesis (as in epic) is set against mimesis

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https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6_3

(as in tragedy). Therefore, drama, though obviously telling a story, is not counted as narrative. This distinction is still essential when Gerald Prince, summarizing the narratological studies of the twentieth century, offered a definition of minimal narrative: "The recounting of one or more real or fictional events communicated by one, two or several narrators to one, two or several narratees". Therefore, "a dramatic performance representing (many fascinating) events does not constitute a narrative either since these events, rather than being recounted, occur directly on stage" [4].

But the reality opened up by the Narrative Turn is that we have to face so many kinds of narratives, some of them far more "directly occurring" than drama, e.g., action art or "live" television news. We have no choice but to find a new definition of minimal narrative different from Prince's that could embrace all the narratives in our culture. The present essay suggests the following:

A narrating subject places at least one event participated by at least one character into a text so that another (or the same) subject could interpret it as having temporality and significance.

The definition, though short, involves 8 elements in two narrativizing processes: (1) A subject (usually called the narrator) places in a text (composed of whatever signs) an event (or events) participated by a character (or characters); (2) The text could be interpreted by the receiving subject (usually called the narratee), and more often than not another than the narrating subject, but could be the subject himself as implying that there are temporal and significant dimensions in the narrative.

A narrative, in a word, is the collaboration between two subjects: Step 1 is a narrativizing emplotment, and Step 2 a narrativizing interpretation. Any text is then either a statement (if it does not meet the definition) or a narrative (if it does). The participation of a character (not necessarily human but at least anthropomorphic) in the event is important so that the event involves a human action. Otherwise, any report of a situation change (e.g. in weather or in a chemical reaction) could be counted as narrative. Stories involving a human character always carry an ethical significance, whereas reports of changes of a situation without human or quasi-human characters usually do not.

In a narrative, however, the most important element is time, that is, the temporal dimension. The crucial point in our new definition is to remove the "recounting" part in Prince's. The event(s) must, of course, happen in time, but the time does not have to be in the past. A performance or an hallucination in which the events evolve in front of our eyes, and a prediction or a promise telling events that are expected to take place in the future, are all narratives as they meet our definition.

Since, with the new definition, we have so many different kinds of narratives that demand a narratological attention, we have to provide some basic classifications of narratives so that they could be treated with different cultural conventions.

3.2 Classification One: Factual/Fictional

Any scheme of narrative analysis has to deal with these two basic categories. Factual narratives do not necessarily have to tell facts, or "real" events in Prince's term. It is beyond narratology or semiotics to discuss facts or reality. "Factual" narratives are those that require the interpreters to perceive them with factuality. Factuality/fictionality is a mode of narrative reception, an essential aspect of the intersubjectivity that motivates the narration, that is to say, it is hardly a quality of the narrated text but a cultural contract between the narrator and the narratee on how to read the text.

However, the idea of panfictionality, quite popular among scholars who have to deal with narratives, is supposed to be based on the postmodern concept of language. All perceptions are codified by language, and language has all along been figurative, and the perception it induces is forever distorted and never accurate [5]. The opaqueness of language leads to the universal non-factual nature of narrative. Yet the idea of pan-fictionality causes serious trouble and too much controversy: there are events in history and in reality, the Holocaust, for one, the narrative of which could and should not be regarded as fictional [6].

The narrative factuality, though not claiming to be facts, demands a "factual interpretation". Even if a narrative might not be "accurate", so long as it belongs to a genre of factual narrative, the narrator supposedly encodes it in accordance with factuality, and the narratee reconstructs the narrated world as such. As a result, the narrator has to be answerable to the factuality. Hillary Clinton, for instance, told in a campaign speech the story that she had been attacked by a sniper during her visit to Bosnia. The conclusion voters could draw from the narrative is, expectedly, her courage that made her qualified for the Presidency. Mrs. Clinton made a mistake of the genre, and she had to answer for the ethical consequence.

During her campaign in 2008, however, Hilary Clinton made a political promise that, if by January 2009 the Iraqi War still dragged on, she would end it in the capacity of the US President. Is the narrative fictional? So far as the answerability is concerned, it is neither, as whether she would be elected the President was then still pending on the development of the election. All threats, warnings, advertisements, propaganda, promises, or predictions are beyond the distinction between factuality and fictionality. They are not factual as the events they narrate have not yet happened, but they are meant to be believed in so they can neither be fictional. I suggest calling those narratives pseudo-factual, as the narratorial intention is to impose factuality upon their narratee's reception, despite the fact that both sides know that the event is yet to happen.

According to their factuality/fictionality, All narratives can be divided into the following four categories:

1. Factual narratives: journalism, historiography, legal discourse, etc.
2. Fictional narratives: fiction, drama, cinema, computer game, sports, etc.
3. Pseudo-factual narratives: advertisement, propaganda, prediction, etc.
4. Pseudo-fictional narratives: dream, daydream, illusion, hallucination, etc.

There is, however, another intriguing problem in this classification. Fictional narratives are acknowledged lies, with, therefore, no factuality in it. Yet the bottom-line of any communication game is factuality, without which there is no cognitive reason for the narratee to receive it. That is why all fictional narratives place themselves into a narratorial framing, and to conjure up another narrator, who can be "implicit" with no self-reference in the text like the one in the so-called third person novel, or just a impersonal construction like that in theatre or film. The fictional narrator task is to make a factual narrative within the fictional frame, so that the actual author-narrator is only citing the fictional narrator story told to a narratee other than the actual reader-narratee. In this way, the story is still "factual" in the fictional narrated world.

Jonathan Swift, for instance, fictionalized *Gullive's Travels*, but Mr Gulliver tells factual narratives to his narratee, thus making himself answerable for the factuality of his fantastic stories. Vladimir Nabokov made a fictional narrative of Lolita, but Professor Humbert offers a factual narrative in his last confession. That is why the fictional narratee Dr John Ray comments in a factual manner, "*Lolita* should make all of us—parents, social workers, educators—apply ourselves with still greater vigilance and vision to the task of bringing up a better generation in a safer world" [7]. This does not mean that what Humbert says is real even in that fictional world. His accusation of Lolita seducing him is, to us common readers, not reliable. It is exactly such unreliability that makes Humbert factual narrative interesting, since Nabokov is not to be held answerable for anything in the narrative. This split of narratorial personality happens to us even if we are not writing novels. Anyone could say, "Let me tell you a joke", and let his/her/self listener enter into a contract to split him/her/self into a joke-receiving narratee who enjoys the tall-tale.

Ian McEwan novel *Atonement*, as well as the film adapted from it, is narratalogically intriguing, as all events told by the narrator-protagonist Briony Tallis is supposedly factual within the framework of her recollection. But the crucial episode—her meeting during the war with her cousin and her cousin lover who are the victims of her wrong accusation, during which she makes the promise to redeem her wrong-doing's, as revealed by herself later in her recollection, an imagined fictional narrative by her acting as another narrator. The episode is fictionally made factual but finally acknowledged as fictional, and her promise, supposedly factual, is meant to be a genuinely fictional narrative in the first place.

That is why the identity of the narrator of a truly factual narrative is not allowed to split. One can never write a letter of accusation as a fictional narrator. That is to say, if the author-narrator does not split up his personality to conjure a fictional narrator, his narrative is not allowed to be fictional, and the teller has to be answerable to its factuality. A criminal, for instance, will be held more guilty if he is regarded as to have fictionalized his narrative of the case. In Atonement, the switching of the narrator personality, first as her real self in the fictional accusation, and then in the pseudo-factual promise, brings out the narrator Briony's ever-lasting agony over the impossibility of redeeming her wrong-doing.

3.3 Classification Two: Media

Any text has to be carried by a medium which determines far more than the way the narrative is passed through the communication game. The medium actually decides the very nature of the narrative genres, because it determines the type of perception through which the narrative is interpreted. What cannot be emphasized more is that the message in the medium is always a replacement. The language, the gesture, the gun-firing (in a military exercise, for instance) could never be the sound, the movement, the object that is actually involved in the event. When the narration is part of the event to be narrated about, it can never be the narration itself. One can narrate about anything but that particular narration itself since it is turning itself into a medium. The gun demonstrated on the trial and supposed to have fired the fatal bullet is only an indexical sign of the original, as it, now a piece of evidence, cannot fire a bullet anymore but lie there as a medium to let the narrative pass through it.

The principle of the medium replacement leads to a basic narratological principle: the narration ejects the narrated world (whether fictional or factual) out of presence. The narrative is the thing thrown out by the narrator into the medium which gives shape to the narrative in place of the events, and, therefore, it can only be factual but never the facts.

According to the nature of their media, narratives can be divided into the following categories:

- In recording media: history, novel, diary, cinema, comic strip, photography, etc.
- In performing media: oral narratives, drama, miming, computer games, etc.
- In mental media: dream, daydream, hallucination, etc.

The most commonly used among them is, no doubt, language, though speaking and writing are very different media. Speaking is the most basic tool of narrating for any human race, while writing is the most powerful means to record. The two media, however, make very different narratives. A recorded text is frozen in history like an insect in an amber, and will never change. Only recently there has appeared the possibility, in internet super-texts, of writing in a changeable form, since the reader now can, to a limited degree, control the development of the narrative available online.

On the other hand, an oral narrative changes on every occasion of being told. Since the oral narrative is by definition, a multimedia genre, with the text in language, but paratext in gestures, tones, music, etc. The narrative can never stay the same on each "textual occasion". All "body narratives"—dance, opera, miming—are similarly multimedia. If, according to scholars from Aristotle to Prince, drama is not diegetic, all the corporeal and imaginal narratives should be excluded from narrative studies. Narratology, then, is regrettably limited to recording media. That would cut narratology off not only from the present surge of narrative forms but also from the very source of the narrative art.

In this classification, there is another type of narratives: those in "mental media". They are narratives formed in the mind, that is, in mental images and words. They

could be called sub-narratives since they have not (or not yet) been sent out in a medium perceivable by others. Our mental activities are, most of the time, "drafting narratives" [8]. Those mental narratives resemble diaries of which the narratees are the diarists themselves: they are non-communicative. That is why, in the definition of the minimal narrative offered above, narrative is said to be a text that "could be interpreted by another (or the same) subject": it could be told to the narrator himself. The mental sub-narrative is the foundation for all narratives, since what is actually narrated is only the tip of the iceberg of what is ready to be narrated.

3.4 Classification Three: Moods

The third kind of typology is possibly the most complicated one so far. Yet long time ago Emile Benveniste already mentioned that the "three moods" are actually universal in any languages with all discourses: the indicative, the interrogative and the imperative are the three basic ways that people speak to the other side: either in a hope to tell the other what he knows, or to get some information from the other, or to give an order to the other side [9]. There is always an intention behind the text, a kind of intersubjective attitude that runs through the narrative communication, in correspondence with a certain type of expected response.

The present essay suggests that these three basic moods lead to the three temporal dimensions in narrative intentionality. The narrative text always carries marks (e.g., the generic conventions) that indicate the narratorial intention, so that the receiving subject could interpret it accordingly. All narratives can, therefore, be classified by the marks of the three temporal-moods:

1. Indicative (retrospective) narrative: historiography, novel, journalism, archive, etc.
2. Interrogatory (present) narrative: drama, cinema, live television news, action art, interactive game, music, etc.
3. Imperative (future) narrative: advertisement, prediction, promise, futurology, etc.

What sets apart the three types is the direction of the temporality which the subjects infuse into the communication game. The retrospective narrative focuses at telling events that have already taken place, and is, therefore, indicative. The events in the present narrative evolve in front of the eyes of the receiver, their result hanging there like a question waiting to be answered. The imperative narratives aim at persuasion that the narrated events could happen in the future, and it is advisable for the receiver to take certain action. The actual time in which the events happen is not important so far as the temporality is concerned. For instance, in the so-called novel of the future, the events could take place in the future (to the writing and publication of the novel) but the temporal dimension is still retrospective. Jack London's 1907 novel *Iron Heel*, tells how in 1932, when the American workers are making the Second Revolution, the female protagonist reminisced about the 1917 First Revolution when her lover, leader of the American proletariat, died for the cause of socialism fighting against

the capitalist oppressing state machine. The narrative, then, is still retrospective, that is, about some events in the past to the narrating time in the future.

The future narrative, on the contrary, has a totally different temporal framing. In a promise, or counter-promise (threats or warning), both the narration and the interpretation focus on the events that might happen in the future. If in 1907 Jack London had written a prediction about the brutal suppression of American proletarian revolution which might happen in 1917 and 1932, it is a future narrative, but not a novel of the future, and he had to tell it by himself, instead of creating a narrator to tell it. Both are serious warnings about a possible future though in the novel of the future the suppression of the working-class insurgents looks a fait accompli, and more tragic than a warning.

What the "present narrative" might lead to?

In comparison, the temporality of the "present narrative" could be the most complicated. The stories told in drama and the novel might be the same (as in fact they often adapt each other), but their internalized temporal dimension is totally different. The retrospective narratives give the readers the impression of the "historicity" of the events, while the present narratives are still evolving at the time of reception with the result undecided yet.

The controversy is about the cinema, the most important narrative genre in our culture today. It is listed as in recoding medium in Classification Two, but present in mood in Classification Three. Albert Laffay argues, "In cinema, everything is in the present" [10], and Christian Metz points further that the cause of the cinematic present lies in the fact that the "audience always perceive the action as 'the present'" [11]. The continuous flow of action on the screen gives the audience the impression that the events are actually happening this moment, and still in progress, like the events of a football game we are watching, with no one knowing the eventual score. But there are others who argue differently. Andre Goudrow and Francois Jost argue that a film is pre-fabricated before viewing like a novel before reading, and, therefore, the events in it are retrospective. "A film represents an action which has already been finished." It is, therefore, different from drama which is always "in a phenomenological simultaneity" with the reception of the audience [12].

Whether the film is different from drama in temporality has been in controversy that has still not been concluded. The present essay holds that cinema and drama are generically similar so far as the reception is concerned, and their internalized temporality is the same. It is to be acknowledged that in drama (as in oral narrative) the narrative evolves in a more or less undecided manner since the actors, as the storytellers, can improvise, whereas in cinema the conclusion of the events is foregone as the film or the DVD are made with no possibility of improvisation. This is not necessarily the case in the actual viewing of a film. The impression of the audience gets from the viewing in cinema is similar to that of a play on stage.

This impression might be intuitive but decisive to the "phenomenological simultaneity", which actually causes the so-called dramatic irony when the audience have the urge to interfere with the narrative to effect a change of the tragic course of events (e.g., to stop Romeo's attempting suicide after his mistaking of Juliet's death). In

reading a novel, which is retrospective in nature, there will be suspense and the reader would have the urge to know the end-result sooner rather than later, but not the urge to interfere in the narrative since the course of events has, beyond doubt, finished before his reading.

The computer interactive games and the super-text (with the development of the narrative up to the reader's choice) stretches the uncertain of the narrative progress, since the player-viewer seem to be in full control of the development and "the events still going on" is no longer an impression but a fact in his hand.

The temporal dimension internalized in the genre is, therefore, an impression taking effect in the interpreter's consciousness, or, rather, the convention of the reception of the narrative text. In other words, it is the cultural contract signed by the receiver for his way to reconstruct the intentional temporality. The presentness in those narratives is quite close to what Martin Heidegger calls "the moment-site" (Augenblicksstatte) [13] which is somewhat similar to Immanuel Kant's idea of "the present presence".

That impression of presentness bears more importance in television news report. In her essay on televised news report, Margaret Morse points out, "the difference between the television news and the print news lies in the answer to the question, 'who is speaking?'" In the impression of the viewers, the "actual" speaking of the anchors in TV news does not read but to talk naturally to the audience, while the writer of a printed piece of news does not speak. So here, again, is the fundamental difference between an oral narrative and a written narrative: "The sense of a 'present' discourse is created primarily by the presentation of moving lips 'producing' the news message as it is uttered" [14].

This "liveness" of the news report is in most cases only an impression, but to most audience, a pre-recorded news report (similar to the film) produces the same impression as a genuinely live broadcast. Statistics by sociological research show that most of the viewers believe that TV news are broadcasted live [15].

The fact that "news" is only a narrative of what has already happened is too obvious to ignore in print journalism. The television news report wraps events of the past in a presentness that leads the viewers to the belief that events are happening at the moment of viewing and the result is still to come. This presentness of its narrative is the very reason for the impact that television news has produced on the world today. The form of the narratives now turns itself into the temporal experience that is actualized at the moment of viewing.

Nevertheless, this remarkable quality of the present presence of television news could lead to collective political events. The camera carries with itself a clear intention what the next development of the events should look like. When a question is asked to the interviewee, he knows perfectly well how the news itself wants to be seen and heard, and he would speak or act in line with this expectation. At the moment of his narrating, the narrative subject of the televised news (the global television network), the narrative text (of which he is also a participant), and the audience (of which he himself is a member) all hang in a narrative uncertainty, moving toward an unknown direction, which the narrative is directing itself into. Yet the direction is set in the intention of the TV production team, or in that of the society in general.

The present presence, then, enacts the intended meaning and enforces it upon us everyone as the ethical-temporal goal has already been internalized in the televised news as a social institution, and in our mind as well. The event that the news narrates becomes, therefore, a performance participated by us all. Although whatever development is, supposedly, only one of the many possibilities, we, when interviewed live, say what the audience want to hear, as we ourselves are the audience. The narrative text, that should challenge, with its undecidedness, the coding system of social and cultural prejudices, now reinforces it. The collective intentionality recycles itself through this magic of interrogatory present narrative. The question of what is the next is answered then and there, because it has already been decided how it is to be answered.

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Chapter 4
The Narrator and His/Her/Its Frame-Person Duality: An Analysis in General Narratology

4.1 The Puzzle of the Narrator

The agency of the narrator is the cornerstone for the building of any narrative. Jonathan Culler rightly observes, "Identifying narrators is one of the primary ways of naturalizing fiction" (p. 299). By "naturalizing" he means understanding the text in common sense, that is, retelling (mentally, in most cases) the plot in a straight-forward manner. Furthermore, most narratologists agree that "an inner-textual narrator can in principle be assigned to any narrative text, not just a fictional one" (Sect. 4.2). The narrator being the key figure in originating a full-fledged narrative, to understand the narratorial function is then a reverse process that neutralizes the narration.

Narratology during the last century has developed around the issues related to, and complicated by, the narrator's notorious elusive personality. The narrator's identification, however, can be a gigantic headache when we have to find him/her/it in so many different types of narratives in human culture. The most embarrassing case is, actually, the most common type of narratives: the so-called "third-person" fictional narratives. We are at a loss where to catch the narrator in some most celebrated novels, Western or Chinese, say, *War and Peace*, or *Romance of Three Kingdoms.* When describing the narrator in the novel, Gerard Genette suggests that the narrator should be able to perform five functions: narrating, directing, forming the narrating situation, communication, and attestation (Genette 1980, pp. 255–256). If, according to most narratologists, this narrator in the "third-person" novel is still a narrator, only "implicit", "covert", "effaced" or "imperceptible" in the text, though occasionally (but not obligatorily) popping out to offer the so-called "narratorial intrusions", then how could he perform the five functions ascribed by Genette that have to be sustained constantly throughout the text? At any rate, as Tzvetan Todorov argues, any speaker, when making a self-reference, could only use the first-person pronouns or their substitutions, never the third-person ones (Todorov, p. 121). A "third-person" narrator is only one that seldom or never refers to himself in the text. However to make an completely self-obscured person performing the five functions mentioned above is hardly imaginable.

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https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6_4

That is why some scholars suggest that only the first-person narrator can be called a proper "narrator", the others (in the second-person or in the third-person) are only the "metonymic" substitutions, that is, reminding readers that there could be a I-narrator behind the text though he does not appear at all. Emile Benveniste observes that there is actually no narrator saying anything in the "third-person" narratives, where, he puts it bluntly, "events narrate themselves" (Benveniste, p. 208).

What is more, to date, scholars have only searched for the narrator in this or that particular genre, hardly ever attempting to find his/her/its common shape in all genres. The hunt for the narrator seems to have been limited to the study of the novel. In, for instance, history, news, cinema, video-games, the narrator is either too obvious to warrant searching, or simply nowhere to be found that any searching is in vain. Once we have crossed the boundaries of the novel, the narrator disappears like a ghost exposed to daylight. We are dumbfounded by the vast void, where there seems to be no trace of the narrator at all, and even hardly any need to look for it. But no one dares to say that the narrator does not exist in non-fictional narrative as any narrative must be enunciated in some manner.

Similar "narratorless" situations can be found in some most common narratives genres, drama, for instance, where the story seems to enact itself too. In fact that is why Plato differentiate mimesis from diegesis, and narratologists try their best to avoid discussing the narratorial scheme in those performing narratives. Gerald Prince, in the earlier editions of his *Dictionary of Narratology* (Prince 1987, p. 58), followed Plato and argued that narrative can only be "recounted" (by some person about the past) and plays, then, are not narrative. But he changes his position in his last edition that a narrative could be "communicated" as in a performance (Prince 2003, p. 58). His new position does not seem to be followed by everyone in the narratological circle. H. Porter Abbot, for instance, insists that Prince's "recounting" notion is correct as what a narrator says is "past by default" (Abbot 2005, p. 535).

Since to find the narrator is the starting point of any serious narratological discussion, we are left with no choice but to find a universal principle to locate the narrator in all narratives. If we cannot find him/her/it in any narrative text, out of the question is any conception of a general narratology since the latter *presupposes* a common narratorial scheme, as a narrative, by definition, has to be narrated in order to come into being. If we are unable to sum up the narrator's general shape, however chameleonic, we shall not be able to clear the common ground on which different ways of narrations can be compared.

Checking the huge works of narratology since the its burgeoning years around 1900 till the so-called post-classical narratology of today, hardly any effort toward a general narratology has yet been attempted during its history, partly due to the lack of success in summing up the variety of the ever-changing forms of narrators, though many narratologists acknowledge that he/she/it must be there in all narratives. As Gaudriault observes, "What is needed is first of all to attribute primary responsibility for a narrative's entire content to an implicit agent, which we will henceforth call the '*underlying narrator*'" (Gaudriault, p. 67). Indeed we feel his/her/its eerie presence in the many names scholars have already suggested for this entity—illocutionary source,

implicit agent, primary originator, etc., but, so far, the shape of the ever-changing narrator has successfully slipped out of our grip.

4.2 The Narrativization

To start a serious discussion about the narrator, it is necessary, first of all, to say a few brief words on what a narrative is. A narrative text is not something that could occur in nature and come into being by itself. It must be the product of a specific semiotics process of paradigmatic selection and syntagmatic combination executed by an agent and put into a medium to be passed to other people. A mere change of state—that is, an event—is not a narrative, nor is its experiencing. Such events can become narratives only when they, after being mediated, become a text telling about an event that involves human or anthropomorphic characters. A text describing an event without human characters is merely a report about state-changes in nature, e.g., a scientific reports. A minimal narrative is, then, a text that meets the following two conditions:

1. An event that involves a human-like character is represented in a text;
2. This text could be understood as extending in an integrated temporal and significant dimension.

Constructing such a text, obviously, needs an agent's intentional efforts, employing a medium or media, though the subject does not have to show up or leave his traces in the narrative. Where, in such a narrative text, should we look for the narrator? Uri Margolin proposes that the narrator should be found where it is "linguistically indicated", "textually projected", and "readerly constructed" (Margolin, Sect. 2). His phrasing indicates that the three means are applicable only to the novel. When we come to non-fictional or non-verbal narrative texts, his three propositions for locating the narrator is no longer valid but should be rephrased as "medium indicated", "generically projected", and "receptively constructed". The question of the narrator is then much complicated because it varies according to the genres and sub-genres, which, in turn are more or less decided by the media employed.

The narrator, thus conceived, is a function composed by two elements mixed in various ways, "individuated" or "framified" to different degrees, and the two could be mingled to form a wide variety. To have a look at the whole picture, it is necessary to go through the major narrative types that demonstrate how the narrator metamorphoses into a series of frame-person combinations to meet the need of the genre.

Generally speaking, all narratives could be divided into two major types: factual (concerned with though not necessarily telling facts) and fictional (not concerned with facts), and two types of media: recorded (in a specifically man-made medium to be received later) and performed (in a natural medium—e.g., the voice or the body—to be received then and there). Crossing the two distinctions, we have four kinds of narratives that cover all known narrative genres:

1. Factual recorded narratives (history, journalism, etc.), and "quasi-factual" narratives (promise, propaganda, advertisement, divination, etc.);
2. Fictional recorded narratives (epic, narrative poem, novel, etc.);
3. Factual performed narratives (documentary film, TV Live show, legal speech, report, confession, etc.);
4. Fictional performed narratives (drama, games, film, oral-story-telling, etc.).

It is impossible to discuss in details the rationale behind such a division due to the limited space of the present paper, especially on why the film and other recorded performance are still considered performing narratives. We shall concentrate on the changing shapes of narrators such divisions lead to, as the four major types of narratives indeed require four very different kinds of narrators. The narrator assumes the shape either as a frame, or as a person, or, in more case, something in between. Which side of duality stands out more saliently depends on the particular genre and the style and by the particular arrangement of the narrative text. But it can be said that the narratorial frame is the basic form that wraps up all narratives, while the narratorial personality may pop up in various ways within the frame. Generally speaking, the factual narratives need the highly individuated author-narrators, while the fictional genres allow the narrators to slide on the person-frame scale changeable from one sub-genre to another, and even from text to text. To find a distant comparison, this duality bears a resemblance to the dualistic nature of light, in quantum physics, in which light is both wave and particle at the same time. Which side is more salient depends on how the observation is conducted.

4.3 Factual Narratives: The Author-Narrator

A factual narrative (whether recorded or performed) does not necessarily tell facts, but, supposedly, tells a story about facts. Whether written or oral, factual narratives have a flesh-and-blood author-narrator (Genette et al. 1990, p. 757), that is, the narrator is none other than the author (e.g., the historian, the journalist, the reporter) him/herself at the moment of writing/speaking, who actually narrates the text, and injects into the narrating his/her personal will, emotions, intentions, and opinions, as well as his/her judgment. If there is prejudice in the text, it is his/hers; if there are fabrications, they are his/hers. Apart from the reported speeches quoting other people, the whole text, every word of it, comes from him/her.

Since the "factuality" could be falsified or verified by the facts that the text refers to, the narrative could turn out to be a false one or a "true" one. Often if the factual narrative is proved not true, this author-narrator can declare that he/she was "hoaxed", "confused", or "forced" into making that particular narrative which failed to tell the facts that he/she had known (for instance, a confession supposedly made under extortion). The author-narrator could claim that the originator of the previous narrative text in question was only his/her "second self" at that particular moment, not necessarily his/her "true self". Actually falsity is a result of the narrative being factual.

Indeed a lie can be called a lie only because it is "factual". When no receiver cares about the possible facts it refers and no longer hold the author-narrator answerable to the facts, it ceases to be a lie.

Therefore, for the factual narratives we may regard the author-narrator as the "executive personality" of the author, that is, the part of the author's personality (not the whole of it) that actually narrates the text. Since the narrative is factual, the cultural conventions in receiving those texts determine that the text must be understood as being reporting about facts. An inter-subjective agreement, thereupon, is signed between the author-narrator and the receiver, when the latter picks up the text, and the agreement directs the reception of the text as concerning facts, though whether the factual content of the narrative text is verifiable or not is beyond the narrative game at the moment of reading. After that the receiver could attempt to verify the facts referred to by the text (as, say, by a police report) empirically (though a coroner's autopsy), or inter-testimonially (comparing with other pieces of legal evidence). Though whether such attempts are effective is not in the domain of narratological studies, the author-narrator has to be answerable to the facts in his/her narrative, in the same way as a policeman to his report, a lawyer to his legal statement, a journalist to his news, or a fortune-teller to his divination. Since the narratives are so completely theirs, their personality has to be held accountable to the facts of their narrative.

That does not mean that all historians who write "sincerely" would arrive at the same conclusion on the same event. Those who extol the French revolution and those who denounce it can both claim that the credibility of their narratives rests on some "factual reports" they found in (supposedly reliable) historical documents, their narration making them personally answerable to the facts of their narratives. There are, however, ways to reduce or even evade his/her answerability to verification when he/she turns a character in the narrative into a second-degree-narrator. Journalists tend to cite the words of the observers, lawyers are entitled to call witnesses, and fortune-tellers often let their customers randomly choose the first clue—a tarot-card or a Chinese character—to be read into.

That is why those untruthful "factual" narratives such as a liar's confession or a madman's report, are still factual narratives. The receivers, recognizing the genre, sign a contract with his culture to read the text as factual, thus giving themselves the right to raise doubt whether the events that the text narrates amounts to facts. The same is the case with rumours and gossips which could attract a large number of curious readers because, although sensational, they are actually "factual" narratives.

Promises, prophesies, divinations and some other similar sub-genres narrate events that are expected to take place in the future. Since those events have not yet taken place, they are not yet facts. But those narratives are meant to be regarded as telling about facts, and they are, therefore, factual. Of these types of narratives, the narrators must be the authors themselves. It is only due to the fact that the audience trust the authors personality as well as his ability to see the future that they listen to their narratives, expecting what is told to become facts when time comes.

4.4 Fictional Narrator: Split Personality

In a diametrical contrast, all words in a fictional narrative (apart from the characters' speeches or thoughts directly quoted in the text) come from a fictional narrator, to whom the author delegates the narration, and, in fact, the author is unable to put in a word into the text over his narrator's shoulder. The author of a fictional narrative is, therefore, not to be held answerable to the facts, since he has virtually declared his delegation of narrating, "The following is a story heard from someone, at some time, in somewhere".

And the story is true only in the narrator's and narratee's mind, not the author's and the reader's. In a communication game, any narrative that intends to be listened to or read should be factual (that is, containing something that deserves communicating). Otherwise its reception is self-defeating. As observed by Katherine Thomson-Jones, "the narrator can be envisioned as a fictional agent who is part of the story world and whose task it is to report from within it on events in this world which are real or actual for him" (Thomson-Jones, p. 78). The fictional narrative is actually talking about "facts" inside its narratorial frame that forms a fictionalized "factual" world, not in the real world. In a novel, for instance, the author creates the narrator out of a character or a narratorial frame, so that, on the receiving end, a narratee could read the narrative as factual in this segregated fictionally-factual world.

Therefore, a fictional narrative must be put within a segregating frame inside the text so that the narrator's words could be communicated. For an example, Vladimir Nabokov lets Professor Humbert make his confession to the narratee Dr. John Ray the superintendent of the jail. In the world both of those two inhabit, Humbert's confession is factual as a confession must be, which enables Dr. John Ray to comment after reading it that it "should make all of us—parents, social workers, educators—apply ourselves with still greater vigilance and vision to the task of bringing up a better generation in a safer world" (Nabokov, p. 8). What Nabokov provides is not only a narratorial person, but more importantly a narratorial frame that allows the narrator to be the author of the narrative so that the fictional text could pass as factual within it. Because Nabokov fabricates, he could spare his character to fictionalize, letting them be the author-narrator of a "factual" narrative within the framed world. Therefore, the so-called first-person narrator (Humbert, in this case) is, in fact, a "framed narrator".

The character-turned-author-narrator in a novel can of course further fictionalize his/her narrative, but it is, then, necessary that the narrative inside the narrative to be "factual". In Ian McEwen's novel *Atonement*, Briony Tallis the protagonist-narrator, out of jealousy, wrongly accused her cousin's fiancé of rape. She is tormented by ill-conscience ever since. During WWII when she had an opportunity to meet the couple, she repented in their presence and promised to go to the police to withdraw her accusation. By the end of the novel, it turns out, that the scene of repentance was her imagination as both of her cousin and the wronged young man had already been killed in the earlier years of the War. The protagonist, being a novelist by profession, should have the right to fictionalize. But since the withdrawal of an accusation must

be a factual narrative just as her previous false accusation was. The intended factual narrative now exists only in fiction that does not relate to factuality even within the framed world of the novel, and the protagonist, having been left with no chance to redress her mistake, suffers the remorse of failed atonement all her life.

In both of the two novels described above, we can see second-degree narratives embedded in the so-called "third-person" narrative frame which serves as the underlying narratorial foundation. Everyone when fictionalizing, has to do the same as Nabokov and McEwan did. The author has to build a frame by declaring (explicitly or by implication), "I'm letting some one tell you a story". Once the listener allows it to proceed (that is, by listening or reading the text hence narrated), he connives that what follows could be regarded as a factual narrative solely within this frame of the communicative game.

Then, how about those who find themselves victims of "libel" by a novel? The first step for the legal procedure or other form of justice (public opinion, for instance) handling such a case is, generally, to establish that the text, having trespassed the boundaries of the genre, is no longer a fictional narrative but a factual one, because of which the author is to be pulled back as the answerable author-narrator, at least in the parts in question. Should the implicated text be a biography or a news-report, the judgment of the libel can skip this first step, as it is predetermined by the genre that the author-narrator of the factual narrative has to be answerable to the facts covered by the text. The same even applies to a "false" entry in one's diary. Someone—a biographer for instance—who wants to cite this entry as a proof of the diarist's intentional cheating on the facts in his real life has to argue first that the author-narrator should be answerable by intentionally overstepping the boundaries of the genre.

After the above argument, the narratorial structure in the so-called third-person narratives can be easily understood: It is the narratorial frame that underlies the narrative text, and, within it, no character is made to tell the story. Occasionally there appears a voice commenting (e.g., "Unfortunately our hero forgot what he had said before…") which sometimes sounds to have come from nowhere. They are often explained in narratology as the implicit narrator occasionally turns up to be semi-explicit to offer a commentary. But in fact the voice comes from the unseen personal parts of the frame. The frame itself, therefore, serves as the narrator where a couple of intrusions are not enough to bring our any personal narrator. If the personal voice is heard frequently enough, the text turns into a first-person narrative, but the distinction is often blurred.

This framing scheme is of extreme importance. Uri Margolin writes: "It is precisely in such cases, several scholars have argued, that it is totally unwarranted to fill the teller slot with a fictional individual figure of an 'effaced' narrator. In such cases, so the argument goes, it makes much more sense to make the actual author in his role as pretender of the originator of the discourse" (Margolin, Sect. 1). One of those "several scholars" is Andrew Kania who unequivocally argues against "the ubiquity of narrators" (Kania, p. 47). But if we accept their view that, in a third-person fictional narrative, it is the author who is telling the story, then there here arises a

confusion between the author-narrator of the factual narrative and the narratorial frame of the "third-person" fictional narrative.

4.5 Split Narrator in Performance

The narrative medium plays a decisive factor in determining the shape of the narrator. A performed narrative employs non-artificial media, such as the human body, voice, ready-made objects, etc., to tell a story. It is a much more ancient form of narrative in human history, long before specially-made media such as painting or writing were invented documenting.

Though oral story-telling appeared in human history earlier, the most typical genre of the performed narrative is drama. But when it comes to the question who the narrator in drama is, we are at a loss. Obviously not the playwright who has only produced a script which is not necessarily followed in the on-stage performance; nor the director since he/she planned the presentation and supervised the rehearsal, but does not have to be present at the actual performance; nor the stage-manager who only helps to coordinate the performance; nor the actors as they themselves should be considered a medium employed in the narration.

In order to locate the narrator in drama, we could imagine a scene: Over the stage in waiting, there comes an index sign (starting of music, changing of light, or rising of the curtain) to indicate that a narratorial frame now descends, turning the people on the stage from actors into characters and the stage lighting into sunshine. When eventually the actors bow to the audience's applause, they jump out of the narratorial frame and returned to "real life". This narratorial framing is omnipresent for all performed narratives, though its "pushing-in and pulling-out" mechanism could be very different from one narrative to another. Children, for instance, know perfectly well that their mud cakes turn into tanks and wood sticks into soldiers at a certain moment, and cease to be so at another.

But what about the role of the story-teller in a performance? When an actor on the stage starts to tell a story, he/she becomes the narrator within the narrative frame, as can be seen in the chorus of Greek tragedies, or the Prologue Speaker in traditional Chinese opera who are only second-degree narrators within the overall narratorial frame. So is the voice—over narrator in films. In Chinese traditional fiction, the narratorial frame is invariably the "oral story-telling theatre" which is more important than the story-teller-narrator who might or might not appear in the narrative tex. The voice of the story-teller in an oral narrating session might be more consistent. But all of those performing narrators could be considered second-degree narrators, and we can see that the situation is quite similar to that in the "third-person" fictional narratives. In an oral report or a legal defence, however, the speaker is definitely the narrator since he is answerable to fact verification.

The debate over what or who is the filmic narrator, however, has been unsettled in the film-studies circles for more than half a century, and still unsettled today. In 1948, Claude-Edmonde Magny suggested that the camera was the filmic narrator while the

director's role is close to the author (Stam et al., p. 34). Similar to this was the concept of "Camera-Stylo" proposed by Alexandre Astruc in the 1950s (Astruc, pp. 17–23). In the 1950s–1960s the dominant idea was "auteurism" suggested by Andre Bazin and others who held that it was the director who narrates the film. In the late 1970s, auteurism was replaced by a more sophisticated understanding. Sarah Kazloff insisted that the film narrator was an "implicit story-teller" who could be named "image-maker" (Kazloff, p. 23). Christian Metz compared the film narrator to the master of ceremonies in drama, whom he named "grand imagier" (Metz, p. 21). All these are "personal narrator" theories that, in some sense, continues today, as can be seen in Tom Gunning's proposal of "Demonstrator" (Gunning, p. 3), or Jerold Levinson's idea of "Presenter" (Levinson, p. 45). There are, however, some other scholars who insist that the filmic narrator should be understood as an institution. David Bordwell, for one, argued against the necessity of locating a narratorial personality in the film. For, "in watching films, we are seldom aware of being told something by an entity resembling a human being… [Therefore, filmic] narration is better understood as the organization of a set of cues for the construction of a story" (Bordwell, p. 62).

Both of the two opinions—personal and institutional—make sense, and the present paper emphasizes that the two actually complement each other to form the frame-person duality of the narrator. The filmic narrator could be a dualistic "cues-presenter", i.e., an imagined personality representing the narratorial frame necessitated by the production. This personality embodies all the narrative cues to incorporate the elements (image, speech, writing, lighting, movement of the camera, music, sound, montage, etc.) into the filmic text, and to throw the deselected elements outside the narratorial frame during the production and the post-production. This frame scheme could be vividly seen in the film *The Truman Show* where a frame, a little too physically evident there, embodies all the cues that the production team put in the Show. Being a fictional narrative, however, the huge dome in the film is only a second-degree frame within a broader narratorial frame that wraps up the whole film.

Only with this dualistic theory can one explain the distinction between the factual narrative of the documentary film and the fictional narrative of the feature film. In the documentary films, the production team is the author-narrator represented by (but not necessarily equal to) the voice-over. All the materials captured by the camera are entitled to be used in the film, because those events in the film are, by definition, factual and transparent to the world outside the film. In a feature film, however, those parts that are filmed not in accordance with the cues—that is, outside the frame—must be cut off. The so-called No-Good shots (where the actor, for instance, bursts into laughter when he is supposed to be serious) have to be cut off, or used in the "extras", like those at the end of the film *Liar Liar* and many others, serving as a meta-narrative gimmick in contrast to those shots within the filmic frame. Such "extras" are, in fact, "factual" as they are outside the narratorial frame, that is, not part of the narrative text of the feature film.

Dramatic irony—where the audience of drama who know more than the characters—opens the performance frame to interference from the eager audience. It helps to reveal the dualistic nature of the narratorial frame. The meaning of the performed

narrative is actualized at the "present-presence", spurred on by the constant unpredictability of its next step. Since they have been watching outside the narratorial frame and knowing better about some foreshadowing details to which the characters are in the dark, the audience, emotionally immersed, always feels the urge to shout "Juliet is not dead!" or even to rush onto the stage to stop Romeo from stabbing himself. This spectator's urge makes the narrative suspense much more potent than that could be achieved in recorded narratives (in a novel, for instance), as the frame itself allows the narratee-audience to enter, emotionally or even physically, to be involved in the performed narrative. Once when Guo Degang, the celebrated Chinese comedian was telling a thrilling story of tomb-raiding, a cell phone suddenly rang among the audience. He sharp-wittedly made a turn in his story, "All of a sudden there came the ringing of a phone at the most dangerous moment, in total darkness. They were so startled that…" For a moment, the narrative frame was opened up to allow the intrusion from the "real world".

The "interferability" resulted from the "frame-break-in" stretches further in interactive narratives (notably, the role-playing video-games), as the spectator-player's participation is a necessary force that drives the narrative forward. The game-players are no longer the theatre-audience members who occasionally forget themselves by joining in the narrative, but the one who are required to assume a personality and step into the narratorial frame and, by substantiating the narrative with his/her participation, become a character turned "first-person" narrator within the frame of the game.

4.6 Conclusion: Narratorial Duality Forever

The various genres of narratives, in different media and of distinct factuality/fictionality distinction, demand their narrators to assume a particular shape along the frame-person scale, thus leading the narrative to a certain scheme where the narratorial frame is more salient than the narratorial person in the text, or vice versa. Only when the narrator is understood as a dualistic narratorial frame-person can he/she/it always capable to perform the five narratorial functions suggested by Genette that the present paper cited at its beginning:

1. Narrating function. The narratorial frame-person is always the source of the narrating voice in all those genres;
2. Directing function. The frame is actually formed by the complete set of cues needed to integrate all the elements and motifs into the narrative;
3. Forming the narrating situation. The frame, as the fundamental narratorial device, carves out the mediated and represented narrative world from the "real" world;
4. Function of communication. The narratorial frame-person urges the narratee's understanding of the temporal-ethical dimensions of the narrative, thus actualizing its signification;

5. Function of attestation. Within the narratorial frame, everything is "factual" in this segregated world.

Because of his/her/its capabilities to perform the five functions, this frame-person duality is universal and indispensable in all narratives no matter how changeable it is. It can be safely concluded that the narrator in any narrative is forever in a dualistic state, with the frame more fundamental than the person though not necessarily more obvious. Even in a confession, where the narrator is by necessity the flesh-and-blood author himself, the narratorial frame is still visible: it starts when the confessor agrees, implicitly or explicitly, that his words after the moment can be on the record, and off the record after another, thus wrapping up the narrative text.

The same is true with the novel—the genre most familiar to us and yet most complicated structurally—though different styles of the novel occupy very different positions on the scale. With the narratorial duality theory, it can be clearly stated that the so-called "third-person" novel is actually a frame-dominant narrative whereas the "first-person" novel person-dominant. In all novels, however, the two phases, by definition, are forever co-existent. In the "third-person" frame-narrative, for instance, the "implicit" narratorial person may intrude, offering a commentary or a directory, whereas in the "first-person" narrative, the frame is still visible as the narrative voice could switch to a more objective description of the situation of the event (often at the beginning or end). Because of the extreme diversity and sophistication of the genre of the novel, its narratorial duality is also most complicated, but still analysable in accordance with the theory.

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Chapter 5
Middle Reclining: The Repositioning of Cultural Markedness

The most salient feature in the rapid development of semiotics in the last half century is its shaking off glottocentrism. The discipline, now taking the cultural signification activities as its main object, bears little resemblance to the branch of linguistics that it looked like in the 1960s. Culture is the conglomeration of all relevant meaning activities in society. Since no human signification/interpretation can be free from ethical value judgment, a study of signs in culture must be semioethic, different from one in linguistics.

To demonstrate the impact of this changing of models in semiotics, a good examples is the study of markedness, i.e., of the asymmetry in any binary opposition. The idea was originally raised in linguistics, and remained as such for almost 80 years. For instance, the asymmetry between a voiced consonant and its voiceless counterpart is universal in almost all languages. The voiced is always less used, due mainly, as argued by linguists, to the additional morphological feature of the vibration of the vocal chord.

Markedness has occasionally been discussed in socio-linguistic studies, most of which concentrate on the asymmetry of cultural binaries, a most obvious example being the male-female opposition.[1] Its discussion could naturally connected to the genders in lexicology.[2] Not many of the studies of markedness in cultural studies escaped from the linguistic model. That could account for the fact that not much result has been produced, since linguists have not succeeded in finding general rules of markedness in languages. After eighty years of heated debate, many linguists acknowledge that markedness in language, though recognized as universal, is still hardly explainable by a consistent theory.[3] After reexamining the various proposals

[1]Linda Waugh, "Marked and Unmarked: A Choice Between Unequals in Semiotic Structure", *Semiotica* 38: 1982, pp. 299–318.

[2]Ruth Elizabeth King, *Talking Gender: A Guide to Nonsexist Communication*, Toronto: Copp Clark Putna, 1991, p. 2, quoted in Marcel Danesi "Semiotics of Media and Culture", *Routledge Companion to Semiotics*, 2009, p. 144.

[3]David Lightfoot, *How to Set Parameters: Arguments from Language Change,* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991, p. 186.

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Y. Zhao, *The River Fans Out*, China Academic Library,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6_5

on markedness in linguistics, Edwin L. Battistella concludes that none of them is "either fully worked out or wholly consistent".[4] Martin Haspelmath goes so far as to propose straightforwardly to abandon the wild-goose chase: "The concepts that it denotes are not helpful".[5]

Meaning-construction is a social right, which submits itself to metalingual rules that often appear as social consensus in the service of the interest of certain social groups but supposedly "acceptable and fair" to others. Most people adopt social consensus "naturally", without doubt, not because they agree, but because they don't know they could disagree, thanks to the education they have internalized, or to their scare of being isolated, or simply to their habit of following the majority.

Thus, regarding any cultural meaning, we see not a binary opposition, but a trichotomous divisions: that against it, that part for it, and that for it because of giving up the right to oppose it. The present paper calls the three sections (of people, of ideas, of actions, of values, etc.) in significance as the Positive Term, the Negative Term, and the Middle Term. The Positive and the Negative, as the two poles in binary opposition, have already been much observed and abundantly discussed in linguistics, and termed the unmarked and the marked respectively. The Middle Term, sandwiched in between, is hardly independent, being neither positive nor negative, or both. In fact the Positive Term is called as such just because the Middle Term reclines upon it, and its significance follows the Positive. The Positive wins the Middle over to form the Unmarked Bloc, "normalized by conventions",[6] so as to marginalize the Negative, making it marked. In fact the very definition of the Positive is the term that carries along the Middle in its meaning-construction, whereas the Negative is marked because it is isolated from the significance adopted by both the Positive and the Middle. The trichotomous situation can be summed up in the following diagram. It is noticeable the Middle, The "either/or and neither/nor" between the first two, is synecdochal but not overlapping with the Positive,[7] while the Negative is metonymical to the unmarked.

Why the linguists have failed to see this trichotomous scheme? The most possible reason is that in linguistics, there is hardly an "ether/or and nether/nor" Middle. Though appearing occasionally (in personal pronouns concerning genders, for instance), does not show up frequently enough to be regarded as the rule, while the Middle is omnipresent in cultural issues and therefore decisive in markedness. There is hardly a middle in between a voiced consonant and a non-voiced consonant. In linguistics, seemingly "objective" morphological features are the focus of study, whereas the focus in cultural studies is meaning which is more subjective, depending on value judgment. In linguistic discussions, style could be more or less

[4]Edwin L, Battistella, *The Logic of Markedness,* New York: Oxford Univ Press, 1996, p. 34.

[5]Martin Haspelmath, "Against markedness", *Journal of Linguistics*, 2006, 42,1: pp. 25–70.

[6]Nils Erik Enkvist et al., *Linguistics and Style*, The Hague: Mouton, 1973, p. 15.

[7]This is why Fredrik Jameson, Ernest Laclau and others argues that synechdoche represents hegemony. Please refer to Fredrik Jameson *The Prison House of Language: A Critical Account Of Structural and Structuralism and Russian Formalism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972; Ernesto Laclau and Chantel Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist strategy: Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, London: Verso, 2005.

measured by the amount of figurative features, while in culture, style is a deviation from the norm, and the norm is actually the style that has been. The process of "marking" in culture is, therefore, a semioethic process taken by the Middle which is the centre piece of conventionalization. We could take the most common marking of gender as an example. In English, "man" is used for "either/or-neither/nor" man or woman situation (e.g. "mankind"). Linguists could explain it in morphological reasons as "woman" is longer and less economical. But in Chinese, both characters of the male "ta" (he) and the female "ta" (she) are of same phonetically and similar orthographically, yet in an "either/or-neither/nor" situation, we have to say, "Someone is coming. Ta (he) is still far." Markedness exists between genders but not due to linguistic reasons but to cultural reasons.

The interpretation of linguistic markedness is not to be found in linguistics, let alone those socio-cultural markedness. This situation can be typically illustrated by the opposition between the most fundamental cultural concepts, that is, the good and the evil. We have to acknowledge that, though "good" is always desirable and should be dominant, the contents what is good is never fixed. Zhu Xi, the celebrated leader of Neo-Confucianism in the twelfth century, says in his *Quotations*, "The good and the evil are opposed to each other but there is the difference between the dominant and the subordinate. The heavenly truth is set apart from desire, and the former is the sovereign and the latter the sinful". The asymmetry stays, but Zhu could have never imagine that "the desire" which was doubtlessly the evil is now the saviour of the consumer society and the ultimate good today.

Yet, however the good and the evil are defined, there is always, in society, a large section of people, ideas, actions, values, that are "either/or and neither/nor" good and evil. When the Middle reclines onto the good, joining efforts in marking out the evil, the society is, therefore, ethically stabilized. If the Middle, on the contrary, leans to the other side, society is destabilized and undergoes a tumultuous revolution. The former Negative, once winning over the Middle, establishes itself as the Positive, leaving the name of evil to the newly marginalized.

The reclining of the Middle, therefore, plays the most essential role in stabilizing society. It's impossible to eliminate the evil since the unmarked has to be defined by the marked, and, if there is no marked, some other things have to fill the slot. To sustain this semiotic situation, what is important is to make the evil marked clearly and wisely, so that the majority in the society identify with the good in order to avoid joining the marked.

The crucial thing here is the naming, for naming is marking, and the unmarked cannot afford to neglect the naming. It is said in *Commentaries on the Waterways* (Shuijing Zhu), a sixth century Chinese geographical book, "Confucius refused to stay here for the night, and refused to drink from this Thieves' Spring, because he hated the name". Another important thing for the Positive is that, in order to win over the Middle, it has to manouvre the standard of unmarkedness, reducing it sufficiently so as to reserve the greater good for the saints, and the greater evil for the devils, so that the majority of the Middle could remain relatively good as their tiny good behaviours are considered good while their slightly evil behaviours escape from being marked.

Similar to the situation between the good and the evil, any binary opposition in human culture falls into the trichotomous struggle made intense and complicated once joined by the Middle: normal/abnormal, wise/foolish, noble/infamous, healthy/sick, sober/insane, civilized/barbarian, powerful/unprivileged, beautiful/ugly, brave/cowardly, and so on. Ever since Michel Faucault's eloquent discussion of the so-called "civilized treatment of madness", it is known that the apparently objective science of medicine has never been purely scientific but a semioethic judgment. Foucault's description of the "sane" people is very much in tune with what to be expected from the Middle. "(M)en, in an act of sovereign reason, confine their neighbours, and communicate and recognize each other through the merciless language of non-madness".[8] The reclining of the Middle is indeed an act of communication coded in unmarkedness (non-madness) that justifies its reposition.

The bionary opposition between rich/poor, is, perhaps, one of the most unstable binary oppositions in human culture, leading to a huge amount of political or military fighting. Yet the fighting is always for winning the Middle, who can never get rich (as only a handful are considered "rich" in any society) but not yet yield to poverty. Since it is the key for political power to appear serving the interest of the majority, its policy should constantly been adjusted to suit the need of the Middle. When the Middle leans toward the poor sharing their yearning for equality, the rich is marked, and the power deprives the rich of their property in the name of redistribution. On other occasions when the Middle reclines to the rich, as in China today, the clarion slogan raised by the government is, then, "Let's strive to become well-off together!" (Gongtong Ben Xiaokang).

The issues discussed in the present paper have been usually considered politico-economic ones, and have been tackled as such. But their nature could be much better grasped and handled once they are understood as semioethical issues. In fact political wisdom knew the trick long before political science came into shape. In *Record of the Warring States*, a Chinese history classic dated as early as fourth–second centuries BC, there could be found the "policy" toward the marked adopted by the two legendary leaders of pre-historic China, "Shun danced with the Miao Dancers, and Yu stripped upon entering the Land of the Naked". When the Chinese civilization was barely taking off, our ancestors had already understood how to handle the marked: It is imperative to name it, to marginalize it, and to tolerate it.

This idea of the repositioning of the Middle, could be compared to a well-known concept U-topos suggested by Prof. Ponzio: Nothing exists in isolation but must be located in indefinite otherness, that is, in the answerability to others.[9] This unique position of u-topos, according to Susan Petrilli, means "non-topos", that is, out-of-identity and out-of-genre.[10] Some scholars suggest that u-topos is close to what

[8]Michel Foucault, "Preface", *Madness and Civilization, A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1988, p. 2.

[9]Susan Petrilli, "Semioethics", (ed) Paul Cobley, *Routledge Companion to Semiotics*, London: Routledge, p. 162.

[10]Ibid., p. 161.

Derrida calls "non-lieu".[11] But it reminds me more of the "*ūnyatā*" (emptiness) of the Middle Way in *Mādhyamaka*, the great Buddhist philosophy, that sets off the Mahayana (Major Vehicle) movement. The idea is summed up by the *Nagarjuna*, the Founding Father of *Mādhyamaka*, in the following succinct epigram:

> Whatever is dependently co-arisen/That is explained to be emptiness.
> That, being a dependent designation,/Is itself the middle way.
> Something that is not dependently arisen/Such a thing does not exist.
> Therefore a non-empty thing/Does not exist.[12]

I can't think of a closer argument for the nature of the Middle in the study of markedness. *Mādhyamaka* is the methodology for approaching perfection of wisdom through rejecting two extremes, which are, in today's philosophical terms, essentialist and nihilist. The idea of the *Mādhyamaka* does not sound that great since the principle of the Golden Mean exists in almost all cultures, if not for *Nagarjuna*'s argument that the Middle Way is supreme because it empties itself in its very existence of dependent co-arising.

The cultural dynamics created by the Middle is due to its capacity to empty itself, that it, to switch out of unmarkedness. That remarkable capacity, I would suggest, is not always praiseworthy. Often it means to go with the flow without a stance of its own, to adopt what existentialists called "mauvaix choix", that is, making no choice but following that of the Positive. However, semioethically, this position is decisive in many ways for the evolution of human culture, because of its uniquely u-topos positioning, as it is actually detached and disinterested from the norm, i.e., the unmarked bloc it forms with the Positive. The Middle follows the norm for the time being but does not succumb to it in an essentialist way. This unique u-topos of the Middle leads to the following situations frequently seen in human culture.

First of all, the Middle harbours, if described in an anthropomorphous way, a kind of ill-conscience in following the norm and rejecting the Nagative. To compensate that, the Middle is attracted to "out-of-norm" significations. What Mikhail Bakhtin called "Carnivalesque" could be understood in this light, and so could other "holidays". There are, say, Women's Day but not Men's Day, Nurses' Day but no Doctors' Day; Teachers' Day but no Officials' Day; Labour Day but no Bosses' Day; Valentine Day but no Married Couple's Day; Children's, Mothers' and Fathers' Days but no Adults' Day. People of many cultures follow this kind of practice, not for fun but for an unspoken heartfelt need.

Following this ill-conscience is the attraction it feels in the Negative. Its reclining to the norm makes the culture stable but mundane. In art, especially in modern art, markedness often equals to aesthetic satisfaction, as to revolt against the norm is part

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[11] U-topos "is approximatingly what Derrida calls the *non-lieu*, or *autre lieu* of alterity opened up by the deconstruction of language". Richard Kearney, "Utopian ad Ideological Myth in Joyce", *James Joyce Quarterly*, Vol 28, No 4, Summer 1991.

[12] Nagarjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā,* 24:18, in Jay L. Garfield, *The fundamental wisdom of the middle way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā with a philosophical commentary*, New York, & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 304.

of the definition of art. Hence the paradox that the Middle appreciates the artistic representations of the unmarked while repulsed by their appearance in reality. Things like vigilante's vendetta, nudity, promiscuity and adultery, garbled language and curse, are not only allowed in art but enjoyed, yet not even to be seen in TV news, let alone in real.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the siding of the Middle with the positive is unstable in culture, but subjected to change. Once it switches sides, the whole socio-cultural framework is to be shaken or even toppled. The Positive, though essentialist in its meaning-construction, is never autonomous in positioning, since it is defined by its capacity of carrying the Middle along. Once the Negative wins over the Middle, it makes itself the Positive. This sounds dramatic but is actually happening every day before our eyes, in important things as well as trivial things.

Such a semiotic process could happen everywhere, necessarily leading to a social revolution. Let's take tattoo as an example: it used to be the Positive (with the primitive tribes) but became very much marked in "civilized" societies, The barbarians' tattoo disappeared on the civilized people with the exceptions of, say, sailors and gangsters. Now gradually winning the Middle and turning itself more or less unmarked. We could envisage that in a couple of generations, the "subcultural" untattooed would become the marked as the Middle of the populace reclines onto the tattooed. It doesn't take a far stretch of imagination to see this "switching sides" on other cultural issues as marriage as the norm of sexual relations, since extra-marital relations are increasingly tolerated nowadays. That kind of switching of markedness could never happen in linguistics, as the voiced consonant has fixed morphological characteristics to remain marked.

In this way, the u-topos could turn itself into eu-topos, that is, something "better", to be realized in the future. Since the alliance with the Positive is only a temporary arrangement, an alternative alliance with the present Marked might be aesthetically or even morally more gratifying. Thus the semiotical principles involved in the Middle repositioning open up the reconstruction of culture with a diachronic dynamics, decentralizing and detotalizing the cultural norm into new possibilities.

Part II
Traditional Chinese Literature

Chapter 6
Subculture as Moral Paradox: A Study of the Texts of the *White Rabbit* Play

6.1 Defining the Field

The aim of this article is to examine the particular fashion in which sub-cultural texts of Chinese popular literature perform their moral function within the framework of Chinese culture. This being too ambitious an aim for a short article, it is particularly unwise to be involved in the argument on the definition of such concepts as "popular literature", and "subculture", both of which are notoriously elusive. Nevertheless, before starting my discussion, I have to draw the boundaries so that my article will not look like a wild goose chase. Though the definitions I shall suggest below have no claim to universality, it is hoped that they will at least serve the needs here.

Popular literature, in this article, is viewed as a generic category historically definable by critical consensus, often retrospectively. Some genres of a historical period are considered popular by literary critics at a certain time, but no longer so at other times. The *sanqu* (散曲) of Yuan, for instance, nowadays no longer considered a popular genre, was for a time held as one. Zheng Zhenduo (郑振铎) discussed *sanqu* in his *Zhongguo Su Wenxue Shi* (中国俗文学史, A History of Chinese Popular Literature) despite the fact that many *sanqu* works were composed by literati authors like Yuan Haowen (元好问, 1190–1257), Ma Zhiyuan (马致远, 1250?–1324?) and others. "Popular literature" is therefore a generic category that covers all the works of the genres in question, irrespective of the characteristics of specific works. Chinese vernacular fiction of the thirteenth to nineteenth centuries is still considered a popular genre even though many of the works are generally regarded as classics. In the light of this understanding, one is entitled to argue that the sixteenth century versions of some vernacular "fictional masterpieces" could be studied as "literati novels", as Andrew Plaks did.[1] Within one popular genre there may exist texts of widely different cultural status.

"Sub-cultural text", on the contrary, is a functional concept that is decided by the performance of the text itself in the culture. Culture, in this article, is viewed as composed of all discourses and all activities—"texts" in the broadest meaning of the term—that impart meanings relevant to social life. Thus, a culture is the

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Y. Zhao, *The River Fans Out*, China Academic Library,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6_6

conglomeration of all meaning production and transmission in a society. But the texts in a culture "are differently ranked, and stand in opposition to one another, in relation of domination and subordination, along the scale of 'cultural power'".[2] This is especially so with traditional Chinese culture which demonstrates a distinct "paradigmatic structure" where the various texts rank in a strict hierarchy with top genres possessing absolute meaning-power.[3] Sub-cultural texts are those situated on the lowest rungs of the hierarchy. Since they are subordinated to the higher texts in their mode of signification, production and expected interpretation, they do not secrete the value legitimacy carried by the latter.

A certain text is considered sub-cultural on account of the particular mode of its performance of cultural functions. Though the performance by a specific text is difficult to examine retrospectively since the various socio-cultural data we can gather often provide us with only a vague picture, the intrinsic characteristics such as stylistic features, plot typology, composition of the motif-sequence, etc., can still provide more or less reliable evidence for determining its cultural status.

This article will focus on the difference between the sub-cultural texts and the culturally higher texts in their performance of socio-cultural, especially moral, functions. The ideal texts for such an examination would be texts of the same popular genre, or preferably, different versions telling the same story based on different cultural levels.

Fortunately, such examples are not difficult to find as constant recension was, for many centuries, the very mode of existence of Chinese popular literature. Most works of popular literary genres, whether fiction, drama or ballad, were constantly rehashed. Printing, having become the major channel for literature, might be expected to deprive the texts of the non-repeatability they enjoy in oral presentations, as books are both re-readable and re-printable. But for the texts of Chinese popular literature, each printing was almost unexceptionally a recension (which is very different from the texts of privileged genres like poetry, where textual alterations by editors are never tolerated unless his textual criticism can prove them more authentic). So the printed texts of popular literature only enjoyed a semi-unrepeatability, as they are re-readable but not re-printable.

In constant rehashing, the authorship of the text was then reduced to a social average, and, as a result, situational context took the place of intentional context as the more important factor in controlling the interpretation.[4] The audience intentionality then substitutes the authorial intentionality, more securely anchoring those texts at subculturalness.

It seems that this sequence of re-writings should eventually be brought to an end by an author who is able to provide a satisfactory and somewhat literati shape to the text, as indeed happened to many of the best known early Chinese vernacular novels. Yet this often does not disallow the rehashing to continue in other popular genres or subgenres. Guan Hanqing's (关汉卿, 1230?–1300?) *zaju* (杂剧) version of *Baiyue Ting* (拜月亭) did not prevent it from being rewritten into *nanxi* (南戏), nor did Feng Menglong's (冯梦龙, 1574–1646) *ni huaben* (拟话本) fiction version of the same story prevent its being rewritten into a *tanci* (弹词) ballad.

But even within one genre, the most "refined" version was not always able to halt the virtually unstoppable reprinting/recension. In fact, some stories are so essentially bound to their subculturalness that they do not reward the refining efforts. Though hardly successful, those refining efforts pulled texts above the sub-cultural levels, which is exactly what is needed for comparative study.[5]

6.2 The *White Rabbit* Play[6]

The texts of the *White Rabbit* are not the only ones in Chinese popular literature that could meet the need of the present article. However, for more than one thousand years, the story has enjoyed a large number of recensions in different popular genres, and some of its texts are among the earliest extant texts of those genres. Though always a story favored only by the vulgar, there was some literati effort to refine it. For these reasons it is a suitable case for my study.

According to the scanty documentation about oral literature of the Northern Song, the story of Liu Zhiyuan (刘智远), the first emperor of the short-lived Later Han Dynasty (947–950), and his long neglected wife Li Sanniang (李三娘) seems to have been a favorite topic in oral story-telling as early as the eleventh century, when the time of the hero and heroine was still the recent past.[7] The historical figure of Li Sanniang must have been of special interest to the audience as she was originally a farmer's daughter. According to official history she was "spirited away by Liu who sneaked into the house at midnight" when Liu was a stable-boy. She became a very important political figure as the Empress and then the Empress Dowager in the later turbulent years, and her brothers all assumed important government positions.

The earliest extant text of the Liu-Li story appear in *Xinbian Wudai Shi Pinghua* (新编五代史平话, The Newly Compiled History of the Five Dynasties) believed by some critics to be the only genuine Song text (i.e., before the middle of the thirteenth century) among the three earliest texts of *pinghua* (平话) fiction.[8] The basic plot of the Liu-Li story that was later elaborated in the *White Rabbit* play can already be found in the chapter dealing with Liu's founding of the new dynasty.[9]

At the same time as it was being performed in *pinghua* story-telling, the Liu-Li story was also finding its way into other popular genres. One of the only three extant texts of *zhu gong diao* (诸宫调) is devoted to the Liu-Li story. Out of the twelve chapters, only five have been found. But we can see that the plot of the ballad appears much more enriched than that about the Liu-Li marriage in *Xinbian Wudai Shi Pinghua*. What was only an episode of Liu's imperial career in the *pinghua* was now developed into an independent story—the rise to fortune of Liu Zhiyuan and the reward received by Li Sanniang for her virtues. Liu Zhiyuan's military success and his subsequent ascension to the throne seems to have developed into another lineage of texts, among them the *Can Tang Wudai Shi Yanyi* (残唐五代史演义) purporting to be written by Luo Guanzhong (罗贯中, 1330?–1400?)[10] and the play *Wu Long Zuo* (五龙祚).[11]

The earliest dramatic versions of the Liu-Li story seems to be a *zaju* play of the Yuan Dynasty (thirteenth to fourteenth centuries). In *Lu Gui Bu* (录鬼簿) there is an entry *Li Sanniang Madi Peng Yin* (李三娘麻地捧印, Li Sanniang Holds the Seal in the Hemp Field) by Liu Tangqing (刘唐卿). The play is, unfortunately, lost.[12] Judging from the title, the vicissitude of Li Sanniang's life was given greater prominence in the Yuan drama version than in the *zhu gong diao* ballad.

In the scarce documents about the early Southern opera of the Yuan Dynasty, the play of the Liu-Li marriage is repeatedly mentioned,[13] and it is known to be among the "Greatest Four" (四大传奇).[14] Since the early twentieth century, when Chinese popular literature became a serious scholarly concern, no text of an early *nanxi* version of the *White Rabbit* has been available except for some of the arias preserved in *Jiugong Zhengshi* (九宫正始). Among the *nanxi* versions I shall discuss, the earliest is the text unearthed in a mid-Ming grave near Shanghai in 1967, *Xinbian Liu Zhiyuan Huanxiang Baitu Ji* (新编刘志远还乡白兔记), which is the earliest extant printed text of *nanxi*.[15] In the prologue it is stated that the play is printed in the Chenghua period (1465–1487) by Yongshun Tang in Beijing and written by the "talents of Yongjia Writing Club" (永嘉书会才人). I venture to suggest that this claim of authorship or editorship is doubtful since the stunning amount of unorthographic and miswritten characters[16] in the text indicates that the script must have been recorded by a barely literate actor who learned the play orally.[17] Anyone with basic schooling should have produced a better script.[18] Though its language is so crude, both the date (mid-fifteenth century) and the similarity of many of its arias to those of the earlier versions preserved in *Jiugong Zhengshi* (with tunes different) show that it is truly a "New Compilation", that is, a recension.[19] We can deduce that this print, of such miserable quality, did not have any other ambition than circulation among semi-literate readers, presumably habitual theater-goers, who could recall the performance in their minds with the help of a crude version like this. Since no one would deliberately condone orthographic errors, the editorial hastiness possibly indicates that the print was in high demand.[20]

The plot of this version had already settled into the form that remained basically unaltered in the later drama versions: Liu Zhiyuan is now said to be a native of Xuzhou (徐州), the birth place of the great emperor Han Gaozu (汉高祖, r.206-195 B.C.). A step-child, he loses all his money at gambling, and tries to steal the sacrificial chicken in a temple. He is caught but saved by Squire Li, a well-to-do farmer who hires him as stable-boy and later marries his daughter Sanniang to him as he believes Liu to be a man of destiny. Sanniang's brother and sister-in-law hate Liu and, after the death of Squire Li and his wife, play all kinds of dirty tricks to force Liu to leave the household. Liu leaves to join the army and, after marrying the general's daughter, rises up the army ranks. Meanwhile Sanniang's brother and sister-in-law try to force her into remarriage. She refuses, and is therefore punished with hard labor. She gives birth to a son by the millstone without any help and has to cut his cord with her teeth (hence the son's pet name Bitten-cord).[21] To save the child, an old neighbor Dou carries him to where Liu is stationed. Sixteen years later, his son, out on a hunt one day, is led by a white rabbit to a woman weeping at the well, who tells him about her life. Bitten-cord questions his father on the matter, and Liu Zhiyuan decides to

fetch his former wife. Disguised as a poor farm hand he comes back to Sanniang and hands her his official gold seal. At the happy family reunion, the evil persons are duly punished.

The second extant opera version is *Xinke Chuxiang Zengzhu Zengbu Liu Zhiyuan Baitu Ji* printed by the Nanjing publisher Fuchun Tang in the Wanli period(万历, 1573–1619). The reviser Xie Tianyou (谢天祐) was a professional playwright, of whose plays only three are known today by title. He seems to have worked for Fuchun Tang for some time, as another play printed by the same publisher also bears his name as the reviser. Though we are not sure on which original this recension was based, this version of the *White Rabbit* play is a complete rewriting; the dialogue and arias are almost completely different from those of the Chenghua or the earlier Yuan versions,[22] though the basic story remains. The language of the text, in particular of the arias, is much more refined. Nevertheless, the recension contains a large number of simplified characters (but no miswritten ones like those abundant in the Chenghua version) not normally tolerated in the texts of higher genres.

The third extant drama version of the *White Rabbit* is *Baitu Ji* (白兔记) in the early-seventeenth century collection *Liushi Zhong Qu* (Sixty Plays) compiled by Mao Jin (毛晋, 1599–1659) and printed by his own publishing house Jigu Ge. Since the collection was widely circulated, this version has been the best known among all texts of the *White Rabbit* play. Mao Jin was among the group of late Ming intellectuals in the Suzhou area who made a great contribution to the development of Chinese popular literature by carefully collecting and editing popular fiction, opera and folk songs. Like Feng Menglong, the most outstanding member of this group, Mao Jin showed remarkable appreciation for the "vulgar" elements in the popular texts, and, while making the text more readable, tried his best not to dilute the popular flavor. Ling Mengchu (凌蒙初, 1580–1644), another great enthusiast of popular literature in the late Ming, once commented on the editing of the *White Rabbit* play:

> *The White Rabbit* and *The Killing of the Dog* are two of the "Greatest Four", but the texts we have now are simply unreadable. It is true that the original texts are crude and difficult to read. But some complacent people took such liberty to make such drastic alterations to the supposedly ungrammatical sentences or colloquialisms that the true form of these plays is now completely lost to us.[23]

This seems to be a criticism of the Fuchun Tang version or its like, and also to be Mao Jin's guiding principle when compiling *Liushi Zhong Qu.* It is due to his remarkable editing skills that, though the text remains highly colloquial, there is virtually no unorthographed character (either simplified or miswritten) in this elegantly printed edition.[24]

Apart from these three versions, there is no other complete extant text of the play printed before the twentieth century, though beginning from the late sixteenth century there has appeared a large number of "selected acts" versions of the *White Rabbit*, which we shall discuss later.[25]

The three opera versions of the *White Rabbit* belong respectively to three centuries: the Chenghua version the 1470s, the Fuchun Tang version c. the 1590s, and the Liushi Zhong Qu version c. the 1630s. It is of course hardly justifiable to compare them in

a purely synchronic fashion without considering the diachronic context. In fact the production of the three versions—one recorded with hardly any editorship, the second rewritten with almost excessive refinement, and the third tidied up with moderate alteration—could be seen as an important indication of the Chinese literati's changing attitudes toward popular literature.

6.3 A Comparison of the Three *White Rabbit* Opera Versions

A comparison of any group of parallel passages in the three plays would bring out the differences immediately. Li Sanniang's self-introduction song when she walks onto the stage in the Chenghua version runs like this:

[*Zuo huanglong*]
I, Sanniang, am a pretty girl.
My Parents are old.
I grew up in the village
Diligent in weaving, good at sewing.

Most of the arias in the Chenghua version, like this one, are as plain as daily speech, with hardly any poetic diction, except for arias which seem to have been taken over from the earlier, and more refined versions preserved in *Jiugong Zhengshi*. The self-introduction song in the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version depicts a stereotypical scene of the countryside:

[*Weifan xu*]
Entertaining ourselves at the family dinner
Glad that we support ourselves as farmers
With these hundred *mu* of fertile land.
Dozens of households hearing each others' cocks crowing and dogs barking.
In the distance fishermen are singing at dusk
And we see boys dosing off on the back of the calves.

But in the Fuchun Tang version of this self-introduction song, the country girl is gentrified beyond recognition:

[*Bao ding'r*]
Alarmed at fallen flowers, pitying the tender green
I stop sewing beside the window, speechless.
Swallows and thrushes are hastening spring.
But how much of it can be called back?

Apart from the style, in the Chenghua version there are a great number of set expressions (so-called *shuici* 水词, or diluting words) ready for the characters to use

at any moment. For instance, Liu Zhiyuan repeats, "All good and evil will have its retribution in the end" (善恶到头终有报) three times; Li Sanniang's brother repeats five times the line, "The blue sky refuses to be fooled" (湛湛青天不可欺); each time at the head of an irrelevant nonsense poem. When Brother walks onto the stage for the first time, he chants:

> The blue sky refuses to be fooled.
> The sadness can hardly be compared to the flowing river.
> On River Wu it is not impossible to find a ferryboat.
> Love of one night lasts a hundred nights.

This doggerel is repeated word-for-word in the middle of the play when Brother forces Sanniang to remarry. Another doggerel beginning with the same line:

> The blue sky refuses to be fooled.
> Eight crabs fly southwards.
> One of them can hardly fly on,
> 'Cause it is a male one.

The last time the same line drags out probably the silliest doggerel ever found in Chinese popular drama:

> The blue sky refuses to be fooled.
> The toad in the well has no fur coat.
> The eighty-year-old grandma pisses standing,
> Only with nothing to hold in her hand.

The clown chants this "poem" when he is threatening to beat Liu Zhiyuan. Maybe he is just looking in vain for some weapon. Maybe these lines exist for no reason other than arousing simple-minded laughter.

We may assume that these doggerels serve to stereotype the character as a clown. However, this nonsense poem can be found with exactly the same wording in other plays, for example, the *zaju San Zhan Lu Bu* (三战吕布, Three Battles Against Lü Bu),[26] in which it is sung by a heroic warrior.

All the nonsense doggerels are deleted in the *Luishi Zhong Qu* version, not to mention the Fuchun Tang version. Literati authors, familiar with stage conventions, used *shuici* occasionally, as we can see in many Yuan and Ming plays,[27] and the Fuchun Tang version of the *White Rabbit* play is no exception. But an abuse of *shuici* is seen only in the culturally lowest texts like the Chenghua version.

Besides the crudity of the language, the Chenghua version is also characterized by recapitulation of previous events. When Bitten-cord returns from the hunt, Liu Zhiyuan asks him, "My child, how many mountains have you climbed? What game have you shot?" And Bitten-cord retells in detail the events of the previous two acts. After that Liu Zhiyuan, in an effort to appease his second wife, retells all the events in the first half of the play. This kind of repetition, also seen in pre-modern Chinese vernacular fiction, is often considered by critics to be the vestiges of oral performance where the audience, constantly coming and going, have to be informed

now and then of the events that had already been enacted. Such repetitions, though greatly shortened, are also found in other versions of the play. Bitten-cord's retelling, 280 Chinese characters long, only takes up 180 characters in the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version. Liu Zhiyuan's retelling of 190 characters is shortened to 126 characters in the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version. In the Fuchun Tang version, the first retelling is turned into arias, and the second completely omitted.

This linguistic difference clearly marks the cultural ranking of the three versions: the Chenghua version is culturally the lowest; the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version is one with the play's sub-cultural characteristics carefully preserved but made more presentable; the Fuchun Tang version is a remoulded version to cater for the taste of more learned readers—a text of a popular genre, disengaged from its original subculturalness.

However, more important to our analysis is the difference in the motivation of the play's action, since motivation provides the ethos of the play. In this respect, the three versions show an order of progressive rationalization: the more refined the version, the more care it takes to give the heroes a noble motivation on every occasion.

For example, let us see how Liu Zhiyuan sinks into stark poverty and meets the Li family: In the *Xinbian Wudai Shi Pinghua*, Liu is a compulsive gambler who does not repent even after he is married into the Li family, who later flees to join the army because he has lost all his wife's dowry in gambling. In the Chenghua version, this never-do-well image of Liu Zhiyuan is not much improved. Appearing on stage for the first time, Liu introduces himself, "I was driven out of the house by my step-father because I squandered my fortune. Now I fool around in the gambling house everyday and sleep in the temple every night." Liu is made a little more respectable in the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version where he is an unlucky man who "loses nine times out of ten". In the Fuchun Tang version, Liu's gambling is arranged by the Maming God who, appearing as a character in the play, explains, "I see that Liu Zhiyuan of Shatuo village is predestined to ascend to the throne and pass it on to his son, and that the third girl of the Li's will become the first mother of the nation. But there should be some arrangement to let them meet." So he sees to it that Liu loses all his money that day and has to get himself hired by Squire Li and eventually married into the family. Our hero, then, is no longer the village rough.

On why Brother Li hates Liu Zhiyuan so much that he tries every means to drive Liu away: In the Chenghua version, the reason is simple, as Brother complains, "This guy knows nothing of farming. Every day a gang of idlers around him practice martial arts on the threshing ground. There will come a day when he beats someone to death and flees, and we shall be held responsible." This is excusable peasant narrow-mindedness. In the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version Brother boasts of his virtue of diligence, and complains that Liu is an idle man. But he then goes a step further and complains that Liu has come to the family dead broke, and so should be nicknamed Liu the Penniless. This is not only boorish but snobbish. In the Fuchun Tang version, however, the motivation is rendered psychologically more complex. Ugly Sister, merely an accomplice in the other two versions, is now the main culprit. She hates Sanniang because, as she confesses, "I often lapse in feminine duty. Sanniang always reported it to my parents-in-law and made me suffer humiliation. Now the parents-in-law have died, it's time for revenge." And Brother is only a henpecked husband who

dares not disobey his wife. The persecution of Sanniang is then an ethical conflict between good and evil.

On the reasons for Liu Zhiyuan's marriage to the general's daughter: In the Chenghua version he says frankly, "If I had not married her, how could I have attained such a high position?" He says the same in the *Liushizhong Qu* version with more elegance,"One step and I am now in heaven. This marriage is no coincidence." However, in the Fuchun Tang version Liu Zhiyuan first establishes himself by winning merits on the battlefield, thus putting himself on an equal footing with the general's daughter. Then when the general suggests the marriage Liu refuses on the grounds that he has a wife at home (which, in the other two versions, he does not care to mention), and the general agrees to let his daughter be Liu's second wife. So Liu's image is not tainted by the marriage of convenience.

But the most important motivation problem is why Liu Zhiyuan neglects his wife for sixteen years, leaving her at the mercy of his in-laws. In the Chenghua version this is simply left unexplained. In the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version a flimsy pretext is provided: when leaving the village Liu vows that he will not return till three conditions are satisfied—becoming successful, winning a high official post, and taking revenge on Brother. This poor imitation of the celebrated "Three Refusals" in the *nanxi* classic *Pipa ji* (琵琶记, The Lute Song) was perhaps added by Mao Jin himself. But the long negligence is still barely explained away. In the Fuchun Tang version Liu has been so completely occupied with the noble cause of fighting rebels and barbarians that he does not return even to his second wife, the general's daughter, for fifteen years.

To substantiate this arrangement, the Fuchun Tang version adds nine acts recounting Liu Zhiyuan's military career, just to prove how busy he has been during all those years saving the nation. In the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version three acts are added to cover the sixteen years, but in the Chenghua, version this is a blank. Some critics, Zhou Yibai (周贻白) for instance, argues that the Fuchun Tang version is a typical *Antouqu* (案头曲), or closet play.[28] But the frequent anthologization in the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries (perhaps because it was the first version of the *White Rabbit* play in *Yiyang Qiang* opera which became very popular in those years) should convince us that the Fuchun Tang version was actually the text for a great number of stage presentations.

The differences among these versions also lie in their treatment of legendary events. The three versions show an order of regressive legendization: the more refined the version, the less legendary it is. For instance, on why Squire Li wants to marry Sanniang to Liu Zhiyuan: In the Fuchun Tang version it is because he thinks that this is a "good match", and in order to convince his daughter, he arranges for Liu to sweep the drawing room and let Sanniang have a look at her future husband from behind the curtain. In the Chenghua version and the Liushi Zhong Qu version it is because Squire Li sees snakes running through Liu's nostrils when the latter is asleep, and in the Liushi Zhong Qu version there is even a scene on how Liu's "imperial" snoring makes people think that a storm is coming.[29]

On the cause of Squire Li's death: In the Chenghua version, the old couple are knocked down at the wedding by Liu's kowtows as it is against the hierarchy of rites

for common people to be kowtowed to by an emperor. This bizarre event is half deleted in the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version, where the parents-in-law feel dizzy after Liu's kowtow, and they tell others that they are not in good health. This serves as a foreshadowing of their death not long after, but it is left unexplained whether or not they are killed by Liu's kowtow. In the Fuchun Tang version there is not a trace left of this killing kowtow.

The most important legendary event, the titular one, is supposed to explain how Bitten-cord finds his mother. Liu Zhiyuan is stationed in Binzhou (邠州) which is quite close to the historical fact, for Shanxi was Liu Zhiyuan's base, from where he launched his triumphant expedition to the capital. One day Bitten-cord sees a white rabbit, which, with Bitten-cord's arrow shot in its side, leads him to Sanniang's village thousands of miles away from Binzhou. The writer of the Chenghua version ignores this distance as if there is no miracle involved.[30] The *Liushi Zhong Qu* version highlights the mystery:

> Bitten-cord: My old soldiers, where are we now?
>
> Soldiers: This is Shatuo Village.
>
> Bitten-cord: How could we be so fast?
>
> Soldiers: We were like riding on a cloud.

Zhou Yibai thinks that this is "the author laughing at himself" as a trip on the clouds is impossible.[31] I would rather take it as a reminder of the legend, by which the play gets its title.

The re-writer of the Fuchun Tang version feels uneasy about this legendary arrangement and tries to put it straight. In Act [32] Liu delivers a long monologue in which he says that he cannot continue to cooperate with Li Cunxu as the latter usurped the throne, and he decides to lead his army away to Shi Jingtang (石敬塘), his old colleague, and also to make preparations against the Qidan (契丹) barbarians who are threatening to invade China again. On this long expedition he plans to visit his second wife Yue, whom he has not seen for fifteen years, and to try to find his first wife Li Sanniang whom he left sixteen years ago. He gives the command of the vanguard to his son who, in due course, marches to the village and finds his mother.

Then why bother about the rabbit? In fact the rabbit disappears completely from the play though it still carries the title "The White Rabbit". The only vestige of the legendary rabbit surfaces when Bitten-cord reports to his father and mentions briefly that a rabbit metamorphosed into an old man who led him to the woman weeping at the well.

It is not that there is no legendization in the Fuchun Tang version. On at least three occasions supernatural beings come into the play. But those legendary events themselves lack dramatic interest as they are only arranged to forward the hero's career.

6.4 The Farcical

The culturally lower versions abound in farcical scenes. These passages hardly contribute to the characterization of the heroes and are at odds with the composition of the plot. As the hero never participates in the farce, he looks, in his aloofness, awkwardly out of place amid the hilarious clowning.

The beginning scene in the Chenghua version features Liu's sworn brother Shi Hongzhao (史弘肇) and his wife treating Liu Zhiyuan to noodles. Shi's wife, in the role of a clown, cracks nonsense jokes all along, and finally adds dust to the flour to make the noodles. In the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version she makes noodles out of the flour for "starching foot-wrappers". When she cannot find the kneading board, she makes her husband go down on all fours so that she could make noodles on his back This man-turned-prop slapstick seems to be a stock technique of early *nanxi*.[32]

Such acts seem to be meant to provide an opportunity for free clowning. That is why the arias and dialogues in this act of the Chenghua version are completely different from the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version. In the Fuchun Tang version, this irrelevant first act is omitted.

In the Chenghua version Brother forces Liu to write the divorce bill. He then makes Liu fingerprint it, while he himself makes his toe-print, and Ugly Sister volunteers to sign with her "ass-print". This scene of low comedy could bring down the house. But Liu Zhiyuan's writing the divorce bill while weeping ruins his heroic image as a man of destiny. In the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version this scene is less side-splitting but still uneasy for Liu Zhiyuan. In the Fuchun Tang version, Liu makes fools of Brother and Ugly Sister by dictating a false divorce bill, thus showing himself intellectually superior to the clowns.

Clowning enjoyed a great prominence in early *nanxi* plays. Judging from the few extant texts, we can see that after nearly every serious scene, there is a scene where clowns dominate. This tradition was discontinued in the main-stream *chuanqi* (传奇) plays of Ming which came to be ever more refined. But, judging from texts like the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version of the *White Rabbit*, it persisted in sub-cultural plays.

Since the basic story is the same from one version to another, the localized legendary and farcical parts are what give the various versions their uniqueness. Each recension seems to contain its own particular farcical scenes, to be changed yet again at the next recension.

Any new rewriting was, in the intention of the re-writer, an improvement. The culturally lower texts, it seems, tend to retain the localized legends and farcical scenes, while the culturally higher versions would endeavor to weed out the localized parts in their effort to totalize the whole play rationally.

This rule, if true, offers some indication of the lineage of evolution of those versions. There remain small number of localized passages in the Fuchun Tang version that the re-writer Xie Tianyou could not have invented by himself. For instance in Act 37, before Bittencord comes back from the hunt, there appears a miserable monk who sings:

[*Qing Xuan he*]

Poor me, I wake at midnight
And my feet are so cold,
Feet so cold.
How I long to have a pretty partner.
But I am afraid, as adulterer,
I shall be dragged to court by the patron.

The monk is an unnecessary character appearing briefly on the stage, only to prepare for Liu's arrival at the temple where he would hear his son's report. It is possible that this was a passage in the version on which the Fuchun Tang version is based, which was, somehow, not weeded out. Since the Chenghua version does not contain this passage, we may deduce that it cannot be the basis of the Fuchun Tang version.[33] The *Liushi Zhong Qu* version bears striking similarity to the Chenghua version in many parts, especially in the arias. But there are also some localized parts that are quite different. For instance, in Act 9 of the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version the Ugly Sister eats the noodles prepared for the monks whom the Li's hire to chant sutras, and she adds her snot to the noodles to let it pass for over-stewed noodles. It is unimaginable that Mao Jin the literati-rewriter could have produced such a coarse joke, though he may have appreciated it enough to let it remain. Since the Chenghua version does not contain this or many other vulgar jokes, the basis for the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version must be another lost version.[34]

The localized parts in culturally lower *nanxi* texts form an evident structural dualism, which, as I shall show in the following sections, could lead to a moral dualism.

6.5 Chinese Cinderella, the Moralist

The plot of the *White Rabbit* play is a combination of two success stories—Liu Zhiyuan's rise from poverty to eminence, and Li Sanniang's rise to fortune through her feminine virtues. This is a typical case of the highly ethical Chinese variation of the Cinderella formula.

The basic Cinderella formula contains the following steps or "functions":

1. Although the protagonist suffers unfair treatment at the hands of evil people, blocking her way to success,
2. she displays impressive merits which
3. win her the deserved reward
4. and the evil people are punished.

Li Sanniang's story proceeds neatly along the four steps. Compared with her Western counterpart, we can see that this process of reversing fortune in Chinese drama is always ethically encoded.

Sanniang's suffering is the result of her brother and sister-in-law's pressure on her to divorce and remarry which goes against the Chinese moral codes for family

life; Sanniang's merit for redemption is her sixteen years of chastity and hard labor, and most importantly, her giving birth to Liu's eldest son, whereas the Western Cinderella's merit seems mainly to be her attractive appearance; Sanniang's situation is that the man she has married is able to fight his way up, while the Western Cinderella's opportunity is having a handsome prince fall in love with her; Sanniang's reward is family reunion; the Western Cinderella's is marriage.

In late medieval Chinese opera there are hundreds of plays following the Chinese Cinderella formula.[35] If we include the "twisted" variations in which the man betrays the woman of virtue but later repents (generally after the woman's attempted suicide) and goes back to her, our list could be much longer. Thus the man who obstructs success is the same one who creates the opportunity for redemption.

To sum up the East-West difference, the Western Cinderella succeeds mainly because of her beauty, the Chinese Cinderella because of her chastity; the Western Cinderella story promotes the exertion of one's rights endowed by nature, the Chinese Cinderella story prizes the rights won by moral constancy.[36]

If the ethical logic in literary works can have both expressive and instrumental functions, then the morality in the Chinese Cinderella formula can be said to express the interest of the Chinese open-élite power system.[37] This system is more ethically based. Since ancient times, Western sages have always held that politics runs counter to man's moral self-cultivation.[38] In Confucianist ethical philosophy, since politics is the manifestation of man's self-cultivation, rising to a high position is itself the peak of moral perfection.

Now the question arises: why is this dramatic admonition on how to deal with changes in fortune so welcomed by popular audiences? After all, few villagers could dream of becoming a governor, much less an emperor. Obviously what works here is the instrumental function of morality in literature, not the expressive function.[39] The consolidation of the family is always seen in China as an antidote for disorder in society. That is why the Chinese Cinderella must always be a married woman, at least a girl already engaged, so that she can have a chance to display her faithfulness to the family and invite the whole audience to join in the celebration of the final victory of the social moral codes.

6.6 The Moral Conservatism of Popular Drama

We can see that among the two types of recensions of the *White Rabbit* plays, the culturally lower versions are even stricter than the culturally higher recensions in their moral adherence.

The sufferings Sanniang has to endure are more graphic in the culturally lower versions. In the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version, Sanniang is made to carry water with a pair of "olive-shaped" buckets with pointed bottom so that she would not be able to sit and rest on her way, and a hole is drilled in the water vat so that it would never be full. In both the Chenghua and the *Liushi Zhong Qu* versions, Ugly Sister comes to grab Sanniang's new-born baby and tries to drown him in a pond. Such treatment,

more likely to be found in folklore, is replaced in the Fuchun Tang version by almost two whole acts of Sanniang's arias complaining about her ill fate.

Sanniang more staunchly refuses to remarry in the culturally lower versions. In the Chenghua version, Brother lies to her that he has just received a letter from Binzhou saying that Liu has been killed in battle. Sanniang says nothing beyond repeating: "One saddle to one horse, one wife to one husband, I will not marry another man all my life." So her constancy seems to be a faithfulness more to the norm than to her husband.

The culturally lower versions center more on the ritual significance of redemption. In the Chenghua version, Liu Zhiyuan comes back to the village in disguise and meets Sanniang at the mill:

> Liu: I shall come back to you with a brocade robe and a gold head-dress to take you away with me as a noble lady.
>
> Sanniang: My husband, if you really want to take me away, what pledge would you give me?
>
> Liu: Here I give you my official seal made of forty-eight tales of gold. This is "*Li Sanniang holds the seal in the hemp field, and Liu Zhiyuan returns home in a splendid gar*".

The last sentence of Liu is possibly the full title of the lost *zaju*, but it is not in agreement with the plot of the *nanxi* versions, as the scene is now not set in the hemp field, and Liu is at this moment dressed in the ragged clothes of a farm-hand. Still more surprising is that the pronouncement should be made not in his role of Liu Zhiyuan. He is actually stepping out of the dramatized world into the dramatizing world to make an announcement, in the capacity of the actor, to call the audience to join in the celebration. This "stepping-out" is deleted in the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version, but the handing over of the seal as pledge remains. But this event is actually superfluous so far as the plot is concerned, since there is no last twist before the family reunion. (In the *zhu gong diao* ballad and, probably, in the *zaju* versions, Sanniang is kidnapped by gangsters. It takes Liu a fierce battle to get her back). In the Fuchun Tang version, the whole scene is omitted, replaced by Sanniang's long aria on her years of suffering, thus making this act more realistic but less emotionally redemptive.

And finally the punishment. In the *pinghua* fiction and the *zhu gong diao* ballad versions of the Liu-Li story, the evil in-laws are pardoned after a severe censure. This is also true of the Chenghua version. In the Fuchun Tang version, they are still pardoned, but Ugly Sister, as the main culprit, kills herself in repentance. In the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version, however, Ugly Sister is made to fulfill her joking vow made sixteen years ago that she would make herself into a candle should Liu become successful. When Ugly Sister is ordered by Liu to be wrapped in cloth and oil and carried away to be executed according to her word, Brother, who has just been pardoned because Sanniang wants him to carry on the family lineage, shouts: "Good burning for the bitch!" The punishment is thus made hellish to the great rejoicing of the audience. This cruel punishment, and in particular Brother's horrible cheer, could hardly have been invented by the literati editor Mao Jin.

The propensity for culturally lower texts to adhere more strictly to the moral code was already noticed by Chinese literati critics in late Yuan and early Ming. Yang

Weizhen (杨维桢), for instance, points out that the moral fervor of popular actors "could make the Confucian scholars ashamed of themselves".[40]

So we discover that for the sub-cultural texts, there is neither an independent interpretation system nor an independent set of values. The ideology of a society is unconditionally accepted and implemented by the lower social strata, though in appearance these values are mainly designed to regulate the behavior of the socially privileged classes. Being culturally subordinate, the lower classes are also subordinate in ideology.

The eager adoption by sub-cultural texts of the dominating moral codes has been confirmed by many Western sociologists in their study of mass culture in modern times. Michael R. Booth in his study of nineteenth century English plays concludes:

> What both the reading and play-going public looked for was…a stern morality, much positive virtue and its reward in the almost inevitable happy ending, eccentric humor, and native English jollity and spirit.[41]

Some critics hold that the moral rigidity of early Ming popular plays is ascribable to the repeated imperial decrees threatening severe punishment on immoral popular literature. Booth seems to be answering a similar challenge when he points out that "dramatists, managers, and audiences were as conservative as the Lord Chamberlain and his Examiner, whose edicts were quite in accord with the taste of the times".[42]

Modern Chinese critics have extolled popular literature as belonging to a culture independent of, and superior to, the dominating culture. For both left-wing and right-wing critics, it has been fashionable to stress the independent values of this popular culture, Zheng Zhenduo declares in unequivocal terms, "They [popular literary works] represented another society, another life, another side of China…"[43] Yet Zheng Zhenduo realizes that popular works may not necessarily live in "another world". In his discussion of Qing *tanci* ballads written by women, he says:

> Here the ethical demand is more strict as the authors demand firmer, purer chastity on the part of the women protagonists, while male protagonists are allowed several concubines without facing up to the question of morality. This kind of one-sided understanding of virtue was at that time so inveterate that even women thought it was beyond any doubt.[44]

Zheng probably did not realize that this is a direct refutation of his own statement in his preface to the book.

There were different opinions. In the early 1940 s there arose a dispute among Chinese intellectuals on the "class nature" of popular literature. Hu Feng (胡风) was the representative of the minority who insisted that popular literature is "determined by, and adapted to, its feudalistic content… Basically it tries to attract the masses with poisonous feudalistic ideas".[45] His opinion evoked intense controversy. He and those on his side were labeled "national nihilists", and were silenced.

Though their argument showed a better understanding of the conservatism of popular culture, they failed to account for the double nature of the morality of popular literature in relation to the dominating ideology. Indeed the cultural performance of popular literature defies any monolithic understanding.

6.7 The Moral Dualism in Subcultural Texts

In the two types of recensions of popular plays we have examined, the culturally higher and the sub-cultural, the moral message may be similar, but the fashion of imparting it is different. The rationalization we observe in culturally higher versions is, by its nature, an effort to reinforce the pervasive power of the ideological meta-language. That is why the Fuchun Tang version spares no effort, even at the expense of rendering the play less stagable, to make Liu Zhiyuan a true national hero who deserves the reward of bringing wealth and glory to his family. Not even the smallest parts of the long play are spared this tyrannic rationalization; all that is irrelevant is weeded out. This structural integrity corresponds to a moral monism.

Such a structuring principle seems to justify the theory of organicism, which argues that literary works should be dealt with as an organic unit, and that no part of the work can be separated, or dispensed with, aesthetically or ethically. In other words, no part can be removed or altered without changing the meaning of the whole text. If this sounds rather exaggerated in describing any work, supporters of organicism may argue that the most important excellence attributable to any one part is to show that it is a necessary element of the whole.[46]

This organicist theory has not gone unchallenged. John Crowe Ransom, the modern American critic, was one of its most formidable opponents. He holds that a literary work is formed by two kinds of non-incorporated elements—the structure and the texture. According to him, structure is the logical substance or the paraphrasable core of the work, or "its ethics if it seems to have an ideology". Texture is what is not the structure in the text—the unparaphrasable, "local" substance.[47]

The dispute over organicism seems to be long over, but the two different critical approaches are still practiced. And in Chinese popular drama, we observe the two different principles of text-structuring. The culturally higher texts are more likely to satisfy the critical effort to reveal an organic unity as they are structured more like integrated wholes, while the sub-cultural texts tend to show a distinct dualistic composition—a logical skeleton and many localized parts that are not sufficiently incorporated into the whole.

In reading the culturally higher texts, the readers are constantly reminded of its ethical logic to which every part of the text contributes. No matter whether this ethical logic is conformist or dissentient, the texts go for it in all earnestness. For instance, *Mudan ting* (牡丹亭, The Peony Pavilion) challenges the dominating Neo-Confucianist "reason" (*tianli,* 天理) ethics with "desire" (*renyu,* 人欲) in such a whole-hearted way that the author claims: "Feeling and Rites do not have anything in common, and you have to sever them with a sword" (情有者理必无,理有者情必无,真是一刀两断语).[48] Those plays could be ethically subversive, but still morally monistic.

As a contrast, sub-cultural texts can hardly be morally dissentient. Since in sub-cultural texts the audience intentionality carries more weight than the authorial intentionality, it is very difficult to infuse dissentient ideas into the texts and ignore the reaction of the audience.

In this article we are comparing conformist, culturally higher texts and culturally lower texts that are, by definition, conformist. It is not the ethical logic that separates them but the fashion in which this ethical logic is implemented. In the latter we find the unique co-existence of the totalized and the localized. T. S. Eliot once offered a very interesting description of the structure of literary texts:

> The chief use of the "meaning" of a poem, in the ordinary sense, may be… to satisfy one habit of the reader, to keep his mind diverted and quiet, while the poem does its work upon him: much as the imaginary burglar is always provided with a bit of nice meat for the house dog.[49]

This hungry but foolish dog is, according to Eliot, "the social censorship or the moral prejudice of the social average reader". This is reverse to the traditional concept that formal elements are an attractive decoration to make the moral logic more palatable. Thus the structural dualism becomes a moral dualism.

The ellipsis in the above quote is a note in brackets declaring that Eliot was "speaking of some kinds of poetry and not all". We are not clear what kind of texts he excludes from his theory. It seems to me that this dualism is not readily discernible in the culturally higher versions of the *White Rabbit* play, as in those versions there is a desperate effort to sufficiently encode all parts. Eliot's description, it seems, can be borrowed to explain the structural dualism we have observed in sub-cultural texts.

The Fuchun Tang version of the *White Rabbit* play proves that a totalizing effort does not necessarily add to the merits of the text, and a culturally higher version does not mean that it is artistically more satisfactory. Some subjects are simply not suitable for such a rational totalization, and Liu Zhiyuan's story is one of them. The stories of the heroes of the Five Dynasties are no less interesting than those of the Three Kingdoms. What complicates the matter is that three of the short-lived dynasties were established by warlords of the Shatuo, a semi-sinicized Turkish tribe (in the *White Rabbit* play the name Shatuo is said to be Squire Li's village). This kind of regime would not be honored by the exclusive Confucianist historical philosophy. In history, Liu Zhiyuan rose to pre-eminence as a general under Shi Jingtang, the flagrant traitor who ceded sixteen prefectures to the Qidan "barbarians" in exchange for military help which enabled him to ascend the throne. Liu Zhiyuan, not directly responsible for this cession, filled the political vacuum by carefully avoiding conflict with the Qidan. Of course not many dynasty founders in Chinese history are of higher moral integrity than Liu Zhiyuan, but his dynasty was too short-lived to justify its sanctity. Official historians, who are often political snobs, comment, "Though fate made him rise to meet the opportunity, we do not see in him the appropriate moral integrity of an emperor."[50] I think that this was one of the main reasons why story-telling on the Five Dynasties topics gradually declined while that on the Three Kingdoms topics, equally welcomed by the populace in the Song period, evolved into a huge number of plays and the greatest historical novel in China. No matter how hard the re-writer of the Fuchun Tang version Xie Tianyou tried to rationalize the play, his effort was doomed as the subject-matter of Liu Zhiyuan, an opportunistic Turkish-Chinese emperor, is simply not suitable for ethicizing.

The notion of dual structure is more applicable to the sub-cultural versions of popular drama. Some critics seem to have noticed the serious localization in such texts. Piet van der Loon, for instance, notes, "une telle action ne doit pas être considerée comme une addition à l'intrigue originelle. Au contraire, l'histoire était seulement un cadre commode pour une action scénique, qui pouvait également se rerouler *de façon* independante".[51] (Italics mine.) And J. I. Crump, in his study of the *White Rabbit* play, concludes, "Ming drama is a form thoroughly devoted to theatrical contrivance and takes full advantage of every excuse for a dance, a skit or other types of divagation. The result is that stories often disappear in a wallow of stage business, cute tricks or divertissements (as a minor example, the playwright's fun with Liu's snores)."[52] This, I venture to say, is not true with the culturally higher *nanxi* texts which strive to eliminate the localization. He was apparently only discussing the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version, not the Fuchun Tang version (The Chenghua version was not yet unearthed).

But what after all are the relations between the localized and the totalized in the culturally lower texts? If they are really as irrelevant as these critics suggest, why should they co-exist in one text and be presented in one stage performance?

My suggestion is that the two are interdependent. On the one hand, the flood of localized parts threatens to drown the plot, diverting audience attention or turning the serious story frivolous. For instance, in the Chenghua version, after the parents are knocked off by Liu's kowtow, the juicy wedding song continues to be sung to celebrate the marriage, which makes the new couple seem extremely callous. After the reunion of Liu and Sanniang, Brother and Ugly Sister enter to fight Liu but end in a howling scramble on the stage, which jars with the tearful reunion scene a moment before.

Since the ethical logic of the plot is almost the same in sub-cultural versions as in the culturally higher versions, there appears in the former a structural-moral paradox which is actually part of the definition of the sub-cultural texts.

First, the paradox displays itself in the fact that the sub-cultural texts have to adhere more closely to the dominant ideology, for no other reason than that they have neither right nor aspiration to participate in the forming or transforming of ideology. As they are farther from the canonized texts at the top, the pressure on them to conform is accordingly higher in order for them to remain under the ideological control. This pressure in fact ensures the covering of the ideology coding over all the texts in a culture.

But this ideological covering becomes flimsier as it reaches down to the bottom of the pyramid of the cultural hierarchy in society. Though sub-cultural texts share the coding system, only part of these texts—the ethically logical part or the paraphrasable core—is sufficiently encoded, leaving a large amount of localized parts relatively undercoded.[53] Though the localized parts have to rely on the ethical logic to hold together in one piece and to give it a moral *reason d'être*, they are not sufficiently incorporated into the ethical logic, and on the whole they do not contribute to, but muddle or even hinder, its progress.

We can say that the ethical logic serves in the play not only as an excuse which, in Eliot's opinion, can be jettisoned as a piece of meat for the moral watch-dog. It is

an essential part of the sub-cultural texts, and both of these—the localized and the totalized—do the real work. That is why sub-cultural texts may sometimes appear hypocritical when they endeavor to "camouflage" the jovial or wild passages with moral admonition. It is not actually hypocrisy but a natural manifestation of their intrinsic moral paradox, since they must have an ethical logic to hang together.[54] The doggerel cited in Sect. 3 of this article can be regarded as miniatures of this dualism—no matter how nonsensical the "poems" are, the leading line is likely to be a moral admonition.

The localized parts, especially the farcical ones, sometimes show a deviance from the norm. For instance, in the Chenghua version, Brother says on one occasion that he would be "first beheaded and then exiled" if he poisoned Liu, because, he says, "The rate for Tax-Paid-in-Grain is really too low in our Chenghua period." In the Chenghua and the *Liushi Zhong Qu* versions, when Liu has the good fortune to be picked by the General as his son-in-law because of the red-robe incident, two other soldiers come forward to ask to share the bride. After being told to shut up, one soldier in the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version says, "In today's world, pilferers win." In the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version when Old Man Dou carries Liu's son to Binzhou and finds that Liu has married again, he cracks a joke, "You are really a quicklime bag, leaving traces wherever you go"—a jovial joke which does no good at all to Liu's heroic image. Such jokes are too localized to be regarded as a political or ideological challenge. Most of the farcical scenes play on the signifer rather than on the signified, as they seem to be without definite reference. This is a major characteristic of subculture that modern sociologists find in today's urban sub-cultural group activities—threatening only in appearance.[55]

Sometimes this paradox seems ready to be developed into a kind of irony. The heroic image of Liu Zhiyuan in the sub-cultural versions is sometimes destroyed by the localized parts to such an extent that he becomes what modern critics would consider a round character: in the two sub-cultural versions, Liu's marriage and remarriage are both unashamedly for convenience, his long neglect of Sanniang seems to be intentional, and he is actually forced by his son to fetch his former wife. Thus his becomes a complex characterization, a combination of the images of Cai Bojie (蔡伯喈) in both the culturally lower *Zhao zhennü* (赵贞女) version and the culturally higher *Pipa Ji* version—a character much more complicated than the Liu Zhiyuan in the culturally higher Fuchun Tang version where he is reduced to a flat embodiment of all virtues. But this possible complexity is the result of the interpretative deduction of today's critics. It is not something that the anonymous re-writers of these sub-cultural versions would ever have conceived, or something the popular audience of the time could have perceived. Structurally, it is mainly the result of sloppiness and discrepancies, and of the separation of the localized substance from the ethical logic. We would be fooling ourselves if we were to go too seriously into an "ironical" reading of these sub-cultural texts, even though it seems like an alluring opportunity for a critical game.

6.8 The "Selected Act" Texts of the *White Rabbit* Play

Starting from the seventeenth century, some other *White Rabbit* texts appeared, in the form of selected acts preserved in various anthologies.[56] It is not surprising that the majority of these acts contains beautiful arias, mostly derivatives of the arias in the Fuchun Tang version. The acts most often selected are Guan hua (观花, Admiring Flowers), *Sao di* (扫地, Sweeping the Floor), *Hui qi* (会妻, Meeting the Wife)—acts where there is little legend or clowning to interfere with the music.

What we call *zhezi xi* (折子戏) are originally selected acts from full-length plays, but later developed into texts of independently staged short pieces. There are some anthologies, beginning from the seventeenth century, that are devoted to "selected acts" plays. For instance the *White Rabbit* acts in *Qiu ye yue* (Autumn Night Moon) and *Zui yi qing* (Enjoyment after Drinking) are developed and expanded to such an extent that it is hard to imagine that the whole play could be stretched in like manner. The act of *Mofang xianghui* (磨房相会, Meeting at the Mill) in *Qiu ye yue*, for instance, is several times longer than the act in any of the three complete versions, and very different from them too. It must have been a *zhezi xi* play independently staged.

In the eighteenth century, *zhezi xi* became the dominant form of stage performance of Chinese opera. In 1770 there appeared *Zhui bai qiu* (缀白裘, The Patched White Fur Robe), the largest ever collection of *zhezi xi* plays compiled by Qian Decang (钱德苍) which includes six acts of the *White Rabbit* play. In these pieces the arias remain much the same as those in the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version, but the clowning is expanded so much that if the play had been complete, it would have been a totally new version of the *White Rabbit* play.

When we have to interpret these *zhezi xi* texts, however, we find ourselves in a dilemma. We are not sure whether they should be treated as short plays or selected acts of one long play. This dilemma is actually the extension of the paradox already existing in the play—when localization is developed to a certain extent, the structure disintegrates. There seem to be some practical reasons to treat them as independent plays, since the full-length *chuanqi* play, by that time, was generally so long that only a partial stage presentation could retain the necessary dramatic tension. Nevertheless, the moral protection that could only be provided by the ethical logic of the plot in the full-length play was still needed, though the ethical logic was now kept at a convenient distance. Therefore, with *zhezi xi*, the ethical logic became a shadow that is neither totally separated from nor totally integrated into the text.

For instance, Yuzanji (玉簪记, The Jade Hairpin) is a boring exemplary play with a stereotyped plot in its Liushi Zhong Qu version of the sixteenth century. But its selected act *Qiujiang* (秋江, The Autumn River) in Zhui Bai Qiu becomes one of the most exciting pieces of traditional Chinese opera, where the heroine Chen Miaochang (陈妙嫦), a young nun, falls in love with a young scholar who stays a few days in the monastery, and when he leaves, the nun persuades the owner of a tiny boat to carry her down the river to reach her lover. This is a bold challenge to the Chinese moral codes defining feminine virtue. Yet for those in the audience who

remember the plot of the play (which most of the eighteenth century audience did), the young nun is only fulfilling her moral duty as she was engaged, unbeknown to her, to the young scholar by an arranged marriage before their birth. The enchanting and provocative short play is then morally safe under the protective umbrella of the original play.

What was preserved most in the *zhezi xi* texts of the *White Rabbit* play in *Zhui bai qiu* was the legendary and the farcical—the most moving scenes of Sanniang's suffering and the purely clowning scenes. They are *Yang zi* (养子, Giving Birth), *Hui lie* (回猎, Back from the Hunt), *Madi* (麻地, The Hemp Field), *Xianghui* (相会, Meeting the Wife), *Song zi* (送子, Delivering the Child), and *Nao ji* (闹鸡, The Fuss about the Chicken). None of the acts devoted to the heroic career of Liu Zhiyuan was chosen. The readers or audience now did not have to read or watch the strenuous ethicizing efforts in the full-length play. But the ethical logic is still indispensable as the audience was frequently reminded of it.

This is, however, not an adequate solution to the moral paradox of the sub-cultural texts. It is only its formal extension and interpretative deferral. In a sense, the emergence of *zhezi xi* plays marked the last phase of the development of the structure of traditional Chinese drama, as the ideology has now to work in a fragmented fashion which would eventually lead to its disintegration. The structural-moral paradox of Chinese sub-cultural texts now assumed a new form.

Notes

1. Andrew H. Plaks argues that these texts "exhibit many of the same pretensions to high wit and deep seriousness as those found in literati painting-pretensions that set the four works sharply apart from the popular materials Out of which they are fashioned", *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 24–25.
2. John Clarke and Tony Jefferon, *The Politics of Popular Culture: Cultures and Sub-Cultures* (Birmingham: Center for Contemporary Culture Studies, 1973), p. 54.
3. Jurij Lotman and A. M. Pjatigorskij suggest the typological distinction between syntagmatic culture and paradigmatic culture. Their description of the two reads as follows:

   > Paradigmatic cultures create a single hierarchy of texts with a constant intensification of textual semiotics such that at the summit is found a culture's Text, which has the greatest indice of value and truth. Syntagmatic cultures create a set of types of texts that comprise various aspects of reality and are thought to be equal in value. These principles are complexly interwoven in the majority of actual human cultures (*Soviet Semiotics*, edited by Daniel P. Lucid, Baltimore, 1977, pp. 130–131).

4. Modern semiotics tries to distinguish five "contexts" that may influence the interpretation of a text: the co-textual, the existential, the situational, the intentional, and the psychological. See *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1986).
5. The present paper intentionally shuns the pair of terms *histoire/recit*, which seems to be readily applicable here. Basically, the different *recits* can be regarded

as presentations on the same *histoire*, with variations only on the sequence, ellipsis, focalization and other aspects of narrative mediation. But to what extent can a *recit* change the plot while still claiming to belong to the same *histoire*? To get around this critical uncertainty, I refrain from the temptation of using this seemingly neat pair of terms. Besides, I have a personal reason for the choice: ten years ago I attended a seminar offered by Professor Cyril Birch at Berkeley on reading the "White Rabbit play." Professor Birch's well-informed guidance, and the animated discussion at the seminar provided me with the stimulation to delve more deeply into the texts.

6. The texts of the *White Rabbit* play on which this article is based are: The Chenghua version: *Ming Chenghua Shuochang Cihua Congkan* (明成化说唱词话丛刊), Vol. 10, xerox reprint of *Ming Yongshun Tang Keben Xinbian Liu Zhiyuan Baitu Ji* (明永顺堂刻本新编刘志远白兔记, Beijing: Wenwu Press, 1979); The Fuchun Tang version: *Guben Xiqu Congkan Biankan Weiyuanhui Yingyin Beijing Tushuguan Cang Ming Fuchun Tang Kanben Xinke Chuxiang Zengzhu Zengbu Liu Zhiyuan Baitu Ji* (古本戏曲丛刊编刊委员会影印北京图书馆藏明富春堂刊本新刻出像增注增补刘志远白兔记, Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1953–1954); The *Liushi Zhong Qu* (六十种曲) version: *Guben Xiqu Congkan Biankan Weiyuanhui Yingyin Changle Zheng (Zhengduo) Shi Cang Ming Jigu Ge Kanben Baitu Ji* (古本戏曲丛刊委员会影印长乐郑[振铎]氏藏明汲古阁刊本白兔记, Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1953–1954).
7. In *Dongjing Menghua Lu* (东京梦华录), it is said that in the time of the Northern Song there were renowned professional story-tellers who specialized respectively in stories of the Five Dynasties and the Three Kingdoms. The stories of the Three Kingdoms later became more popular—I shall explain why further on in this article. Liu Zhiyuan is generally considered one of the most attractive heroes in the Five Dynasties stories. See Liu Dajie (刘大杰), *Zhongguo Wenxue Fazhan Shi* (中国文学发展史, Shanghai: Gudian Wenxue Press, 1959), p. 363; also J. I. Crump, "Liu Chihyuan in the Chinese 'Epic' Ballad, and Drama", *Literature East and West*, Vol. xiv, 1970, p. 155.
8. Liu Dajie, for instance, holds that the extant texts of the other two early vernacular *pinghua, Quanxiang Pinghua Wuzhong* (全相平话五种) and *Da Song Xuanhe Yishi* (大宋宣和遗事), should be dated not earlier than the beginning of Yuan (that is, early thirteenth century). But he spares this novel. Ibid., p. 312. Not all the decreed taboo characters of the Song Dynasty are carefully avoided in the text, but that may be because it was printed by a commercial press.
9. In the late-Ming collection of short stories *Gu Jin Xiaoshuo* (古今小说) compiled by Feng Menglong there is a story about Shi Hongzhao (史弘肇) and Guo Wei (郭威), the two generals under Liu Zhiyuan's command. So not only Liu Zhiyuan and his wife, but other members of his military junta also became heroes of oral literature.
10. Zhao Jingchen (赵景琛) holds that the *pinghua* may have first been written in the Yuan period since many of the episodes were used in Yuan *zaju* plays. See his *Zhongguo Xiaoshuo Kaozheng* (中国小说考证, Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1980), pp. 122–129. Obviously this *yanyi* was another product of Song story-telling

on Five Dynasties topics, as the Liu-Li marriage story is not even mentioned in it. In Five Dynasties plays after Yuan, events from the *pinghua* and the *yanyi* gradually mingled.

11. See *Quhai Zongmu Tiyao* (曲海总目提要), Vol. 31. The play is also titled *Hou baitu* (后白兔, The Latter White Rabbit). But this does not mean that the play in its original form took shape later than the *White Rabbit* play.
12. This entry is also found in *Taihe Zhengyin Pu* (太和正音谱) and *Yuan Qu Xuan Mu* (元曲选目), but the title is 麻地傍印, and in another edition of *Lu Gui Bu* the title is李三娘麻地傍郎. The variation of titles may indicate that there are more than one *zaju* version of the *White Rabbit* play, though they purport to be written by the same author.
13. For instance, Xu Wei (徐渭) mentioned the title *Liu Zhiyuan Baitu Ji* in his *Nanci Xulu* (南词叙录); Zhang Mu (张牧) mentioned the title *Fengxue Hongpao Liu Zhiyuan* (风雪红袍刘志远) in his *Lize Suibi* (笠泽随笔). In Chapter 64 of *Jin Ping Mei Cihua* (金瓶梅词话), the title *Liu Zhiyuan Hongpao Ji* (刘志远红炮记) is also mentioned.
14. There are two different lists of the "Greatest Four": Jing-Liu-Bai-Sha (荆刘拜杀) or Cai-Jing-Liu-Sha (蔡荆刘杀). The *White Rabbit* (Liu) is on both.
15. There are, in fact, three *nanxi* plays preserved in the Chinese encyclopedia *Yongle Dadian* (永乐大典). But the encyclopedia itself is a scribed book, and we have no evidence that the *nanxi* texts there were copied from printed editions.
16. For instance, on the page following the title page there can be found as many as twenty-five unorthographic or miswritten characters.
17. It is, of course, unfair to put the whole blame of a poor edition on the writer of the manuscripts, but the majority of the sixteen long ballads unearthed together with this play were apparently prepared by the same carver, and they do not contain as many mistaken characters. We can only deduce that this carver was just following the manuscripts.
18. Some other extant texts of the Southern Opera also purport to be written by playwrights of other clubs. For instance *Zhangxie Zhuangyuan* (张协状元) purports to have been written by the Talents of Jiushan Shuhui of Wenzhou. We have no evidence that these claims of authorship are authentic, and the poor orthography of the Chenghua version of the White Rabbit play makes such claims even more suspicious. In fact the activities of such playwright clubs are mostly mentioned in the documents of Song, Jin and Yuan, but hardly in any of Ming.
19. Sun Chongtao (孙崇涛), after a careful comparison of the fifty-seven arias supposed to belong to the earliest Yuan Nanxi Liu Zhiyuan (云南锡刘志远) preserved in *Jiugong Zhengshi* with the arias in the Chenghua version and those in the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version, concludes that the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version, though written two centuries later than the Chenghua version, must be based on the earlier Yuan versions. (Sun Chongtao, "Chenghua Ben *Baitu Ji Yu Yuan Chuanqi Liu Zhiyuan"* [成化本白兔记与元传奇刘志远], *Wenshi* [文史], No. 20, 1983, pp. 213–219). He points out that the arias in the Chenghua version, though quite similar to those of Yuan versions in lyrics, are set to

entirely different tunes. This is a clear indication that the Chenghua version must belong to a local opera different from those Yuan versions. His argument sounds convincing.

20. This Southern opera play, with so many unorthographed characters recongnizable only to southerners, was printed by a Beijing publisher. The name of the publisher is printed on the ballads unearthed together with the play. They were obviously carved by the same person.
21. The translation of this and other names in the play are borrowed from Cyril Birch's essay "The White Rabbit Plays: The Birth at the Mill, and Other Scenes", *Chinese Literature: Essays in Honor of J. I. Crump* (forthcoming).
22. There are only several arias in the Fuchun Tang, version that are somewhat similar to those of the Yuan version (as preserved in *Jiugong Zhenshi*), the Chenghua version, or the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version.
23. Ling Mengchu, "Tanqu zazha" (谭曲杂札), *Zhongguo Gudai Xiqu Lilun Ziliao* (中国古代戏曲理论资料, Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Press, 1988), p. 186.
24. Peng Fei (彭飞) argues, "The *Liushi Zhong Qu* version deletes too much farcical dialogue… and sounds too cold and cheerless though much more refined. It is not only undesirable but impossible to let actors stage this version exactly as it is." See his *Luelun Chenghua Ben Baitu Ji* (略论成化本白兔记), *Wenxue Yichan* (文学遗产), No. 3 (1983), p. 75. It seems that Peng Fei had not read the Fuchun Tang version which is far "colder" and more "refined" than the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version. However, even this too "refined" *Liushi Zhong Qu* version was criticized by Wu Mei (吴梅): "The language is unbearably crude. It is enough to make a person vomit." *Guqu Zhutan* (顾曲麈谈, Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1944), p. 167. The two diametrically opposite comments show how the version successfully takes the middle course.
25. There are reported to be modern versions in Peking opera (京剧), Xiang opera (湘剧), Yue opera (越剧), Qin Qiang opera (秦腔), Huangmei opera (黄梅剧), and other local operas since the end of nineteenth century, but my study is limited to texts before the twentieth century.
26. Quoted in Tang Wenbiao (唐文标), *Zhongguo Gudai Xiju Shi Chugao* (中国古代戏剧史初稿, Taipei: Linking Press, 1984), p. 201.
27. Tang Wenbiao offers a long list of those *shuici* poems quoting from works by such celebrated playwrights as Wang Shifu (王实甫), Guan Hanqing and Qiao Ji (乔吉). Ibid., pp. 191–207.
28. Zhou Yibai, *Zhongguo Xiqu Fazhan Shi Gangyao* (中国戏曲发展史纲要, Shanghai: Guji Press, 1979), pp. 228–229.
29. "Snakes running through nostrils" as a sign for the future emperor is a common legend, which might have its origin in the biography of Wang Tingcou (王延湊) in *Xin Tang Shu* (新唐书). In *Wudai Shi Pinghua* (五代史平话), for instance, Zhu Wen (朱温), the first emperor of Liang, is seen to have sn akes running through his nostrils when he was sleeping.
30. Wang Jisi (王季思) holds that the white rabbit legend is borrowed from Guan Hanqing's *zaju* play *Liu Furen Qingshang Wu Hou Yan* (刘夫人庆赏侯宴). See "Liu Zhiyuan Gushi De Yanhua" (刘智远故事的演化), *Song Yuan Ming*

Juqu Yanjiu Luncong (宋元明戏曲研究论丛, Taipei: Dadong Book Company, 1979), pp. 4–9. Actually this magic white rabbit appears frequently in Chinese popular literature. In chapter 43 of *Shuihu Zhuan* (水浒传), Li Kui is led by a white rabbit to his lost mother. In chapter 37 of *Xiyou Ji* (西游记), a prince is led by a white rabbit to the ghost of his father. In *Wudai Shipinghua*, when Zhu Wen is giving a banquet, a white rabbit runs in and turns into a piece of paper bearing the prediction for his future; Shi Jingtang catches a white fox on a hunt which tells him about his future in human language.

31. Zhou Yibai, p. 224.
32. The best known example is found in the Yuan Southern Opera *Zhangxie. Zhuangyuan* in which two actors improvise as the two doors of a temple, and a clown turns himself into a banquet table, and, as can be expected, steals the fine food on his back, since he could change back into his other role at will.
33. Ye Kaiyuan (叶开沅), after comparing an "selected act" play of Wu opera with Act 34 of the Fuchun Tang version, finds that though the two are similar, the Wu opera act is nearer to the selected act preserved in *Qiuye yue* (秋夜月), an anthology of "selected acts". He concludes, "the Fuchun Tang version must be a recension from a still earlier version, part of which is preserved in the present Wu opera version". See his "*Baitu Ji* De Banben Wenti—Fuben Xitong" (白兔记的版本问题—富本系统), *Lanzhou Daxue Xuebao* (兰州大学学报) No. 1, 1983, pp. 81–92; "*Baitu Ji* De Banben Wenti—Jiben Xitong" (白兔记的版本问题——汲本系统), *Lanzhou Daxue Xuebao*, No. 2, 1983, pp. 76–84.
34. Sun Chongtao also concludes that the *Liushi Zhong Qu* version must be based on a version possibly earlier than the Chenghua version. He arrives at this conclusion by textual criticism of the arias, not by comparing the clowning scenes. Sun, p. 58. His method is of course more exact, but mine, I hope, may shed light on the structure of popular plays.
35. To name just a few: Among *zaju* plays *Yuhu Chun* (玉壶春, Spring in the Jade Pot); *Xiaoxiang Yu* (潇湘雨, Rain on the Xiang River); *Hong Lihua* (红梨花, Red Peach Flower); *Yuanyang Bei* (鸳鸯被, Mandarine Duck Quilt); *Bi Taohua* (碧桃花, The Green Peach Flower); among early *nanxi* plays *Jinchai Ji* (荆钗记, The Thorn Hairpin); *Fenxiang Ji* (焚香记, Burning the Incense). When *chuan-qi* opera was at the height of its popularity, plays of this type became more abundant. Wang Jisi holds that the play *Fen He Wan* (汾河湾, The Fen River Bend) is a redressing of the Liu-Li story in the *White Rabbit* (Wang, p. 4). This inference is not necessary as the formula is so frequently used that it is only another application of the same pattern.
36. Both are of course manifestations of women's dependency. Colette Dowling defines what she calls the Cinderella Complex in her militant book *The Cinderella Complex, Women's Hidden Fear of Independence* (London: Fontana, 1982, p. 29) as "a network of largely repressed attitudes and fears that keeps women in a kind of half-light… waiting for something external to transform their lives".
37. To borrow Walter Scott's term for the British power-structure—open-aristocracy.

38. See Plato, *Socrate's Defense*, pp. 30e–32, and also Sallustius, *Bellum Cati-linae*, p. iii.
39. Zhou Yibai, the well-known Chinese scholar of traditional drama, declares, after summarizing plays of this type:

> …Why does this theme seem to be so welcomed in *nanxi* by the end of Yuan? Here lies an important social problem of the time…The literati at the time, after their success in the civil examination, discarded their old friends, changed their wives, some even stamped the former wife to death or forced her to commit suicide… Thus a class conflict arises from their betrayal of their former class (Zhou Yibai, pp. 228–229).

As if to support Zhou's argument, the Taiwan critic Tang Wenbiao quotes from a number of documents that there were actual cases of families splitting after the scholars' success in the civil examination, and he even called such plays "current affairs plays" (Tang Wenbiao, pp. 90–92).

40. Yang Weizhen, "Song Zhu Nüshi Guiying Yanshi Xu" (送朱女士桂英演史序), *Dongweizi Wenji* (东维子文集), *Sibu Congkan* (四部丛刊, Shanghai: Hanfeng lou, 1929), Vol. 6, p. 12. Similar statements can be found in his other two essays "Zhu Ming youxi xu" (朱明优戏序) and "Youxi lu xu" (优戏录序), Ibid., Vol. 11, pp. 14–16.
41. Michael R. Booth, Introduction, *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), Vol. 1, p. 7.
42. Ibid, p. 8. IVL. Janowitz, in his study of mass communication in modern society, "The Application of Social Knowledge to Mass Communication", *World Congress of Sociology* (London: Sage Publications, 1959), p. 142, also concludes:

> The vast majority of mass communications appear to have little content directed toward challenging existing normative patterns, encouraging critical thoughts, or stimulating individual or collective actions disruptive of the more or less orderly flow of existent social progress.

J.S.R. Goodlad, when examining modern Western drama in *A Sociology of Popular Drama* (London: Heinemann, 1971, p. 60) argues:

> …popular drama, as opposed to drama favored by social revolutionaries, innovators, and intellectuals, is likely to be conservative in orientation. If it is concerned with crime, it is likely to show who is to be excluded from the conventional society and why.

A. H. Cooke, ("Human Values in Drama", *Journal of Human Relations*, Spring Issue, 1958, p. 75) concludes after investigating the audience of different types of plays that the most morally disturbing plays are bound to be unpopular because in popular plays, "the morality discussed, arid by and large upheld, is straight-forward, conventional, and simple, even if slightly crude".
J. T. Klapper, too, finds that modern mass communication "serves more often as an agent of reinforcement than of conversion".

43. Zheng Zhenduo, *Zhongguo Su Wenxue Shi* (Beijing: Zuojia Press, 1954), Vol. 1, p. 21.

44. Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 377.
45. Hu Feng (Zhang Guangren 张光人), *Lun Mingzu Xingshi* (论民族形式, On National Form, Shanghai: Haiyan shudian, 1949), p. 51.
46. It seems that most critics since Aristotle are for this theory. Its modern apologists include critics of diverse tendencies such as Coleridge, Emerson, Hegel, Croce, Dewey, Wimsatt, Lukacs and others. It is no coincidence that both Wimsatt's defense of organicism, "The concrete universal", and Lukacs's "The dialectical totality" are avowedly Hegelian. But the most powerful defenders of organicism are none other than the structuralists. Frank Kermode in "The Use of Codes", *Essays* on Fiction 1971-1982 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 75, hit the nail on the head when he commented on Roland Barthes:

> One reason why Barthes gave up the Formalist attempt to establish a narrative *langue* of which every *recit* is a *parole* was precisely his fear that success in this operation would revive the old organicist myth of a structure peculiar to a particular work.

47. John Crowe Ransom, "Criticism as Pure Speculation", *The Intent of Critic*, edited by Donald A. Stauffer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 109.
48. Tang Xianzu (汤显祖), "Ji Daguan" (寄达见), *Tang Xianzu shiwen ji*(汤显祖诗文集), edited by Xu Shuofang (徐塑方, Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Press, 1982), p. 1268.
49. T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933), p. 151.
50. Xue Juzheng (薛居正) et al., *Jiu Wudai shi* (旧五代史, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1978), Vol. 5, p. 1341.
51. Piet van der Loon, "Les Origines rituelles de theatre chinois", *JournaIAsiati–que*, cclxv (1977), p. 87.
52. J. I. Crump, p. 160.
53. The term "undercoding" was first suggested by Umberto Eco in his *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 135–136. His definition runs as follows:

> Undercoding may be defined as the operation by means of which in the absence of reliable pre-established rules, certain macroscopic portions of certain texts are provisionally assumed to be pertinent units of a code in formation, even though the combinational rules governing the more basic compositional items of the expressions, along with the corresponding content-units, remain unknown.

Eco's definition and his explanation in his book clearly indicate that his notion of undercoding is actually under-decoding, a way of interpretation with a rough coding when adequate coding is unavailable or unnecessary. What I mean by undercoding in this paper, however, is under-encoding which, I venture to suggest, occurs when some parts of a text are less sufficiently encoded by a particular set of codes than other parts of the same text, to the extent that they are semantically less functional. I shall refrain from going too deep into this rather abstract discussion, but I have to point out that the idea of under-encoding

(and over-encoding too) in the production of the text is necessary if we want to understand the complicated control of texts by the ideological metalanguage.

54. When comparing traditional Chinese drama with Greek drama, Tang Wenbiao's words are interesting:

> Traditional Chinese drama is basically for entertainment… for the leisure and pleasure of the audience. Even when there is some moral admonition or satire, it is only in the habitual sense of social mission.
>
> The Chinese never entertain or throw themselves into the sorrow of life whole-heartedly (Tang Wenbiao, p. 2).

I do not agree with Tang that this dualism is a habit of Chinese literati. This "piecing-together" of two extremes is more visible in popular drama.

55. Dick Hebdige, *The Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 56.

56. The following is a list of the anthologies that included acts of the *White Rabbit* play. The list is only roughly chronologically arranged, since in many cases we are not very sure of the publishing date. Many of the anthologies have been carefully described by Luo Jintang (罗锦堂), *Zhongguo Xiqu Zongmu Huibian* (中国戏曲总目汇编, Hong Kong: Wanyou Book Company, 1966), or reprinted by Wang Qiugui (王秋桂) in his *Shanben Xiqu Congkan* (善本戏曲丛刊, Taipei: Xuesheng Shudian, 1984).

    (1) Gelin Shicui (歌林拾翠), compiled by anonymous, printed by Kuibi Zhai (奎壁斋). Eight acts of the *White Rabbit* Play.
    (2) Qiuye yue (秋夜月), compiled by Yin Qisheng (殷启圣), printed in Wanli period by Yanshi Ju (燕石居). Three acts of the *White Rabbit* Play.
    (3) *Qingyang Diao Cilin* (青阳调词林), compiled by Huang Wenhua (黄文华), printed in Wanli period. One act of the *White Rabbit* Play.
    (4) *Kunchi Xindiao* (昆池新调), compiled by Huang Wenhua, printed by Airi Tang (爱日堂) in Wanli period. One act of the *White Rabbit* Play.
    (5) *Yugu Diaohuang* (玉谷调簧), printed in 1610. Three acts of the *White Rabbit* Play.
    (6) *Zhaijin Qiyin* (摘锦奇音), compiled by Gong Zhengwo (龚正我), printed 1611. Three acts of the *White Rabbit* Play.
    (7) *Chantou bailian* (缠头百练), printed in 1630. Two acts of the *White Rabbit* Play.
    (8) *Xuanxue pu* (玄谱), compiled by Chulan Renren (锄兰忍人), printed around the end of Ming. One act of the *White Rabbit* Play.
    (9) *Zui yiqing* (醉怡情), compiled by Gulu Diaosoubb(孤芦钓叟), printed by Zhihe Tang (致和堂) around the beginning of Qing Dynasty. Four acts of the *White Rabbit* Play.

    There is stored in the Escorial, Spain, an anthology with a few acts of the *White Rabbit* Play printed in 1553 by Jinxian Tang (进贤堂).

Chapter 7
Historiography and Fiction in Chinese Culture

I

Any act of signification has to be executed through a certain medium. However, medium (in our case, the Chinese vernacular language) is neither neutral nor passive. It moulds the formal features of the message into a culturally acknowledged pattern habitually called genre. Genre facilitates the interpretation, but, on the other hand, restricts the scope of signification.

For literature, this restriction is not always desirable. Often we find in any type of discourse an inclination to break away from the boundary of its own communicative pattern in an effort to achieve the effects of other genres. This extra-generic emulation may take place at an early stage of new genres. Early photography emulated painting, and early film emulated theatrical performance. One of the main reasons for this emulation of other discursive genres, apart from technical reasons, is that the "lower" genres have to prove that they can function in a similar fashion to more prestigious genres. They grow out of this premature extra-generic emulation when their own cultural position is established and culturally recognized.

In a pyramidic culture like that of China, however, extra-generic emulation can become a constant aspiration for the culturally lower genres, as they do not hope to enjoy a cultural mobility to move out of the lower strata. Chinese vernacular fiction, for centuries situated so low in the cultural discursive hierarchy, had to continue to emulate certain prestigious genres in order to justify itself. In this way, the extra-generic emulation finally turned into the cultural paradigm of the genre,[1] to be its basic principle of signification.

Historiography used to be the supreme narrative model in China, and, in the light of the long-standing proposition that all the Six Scriptures mentioned by Confucius (*li*, ritual; *yue*, musical; *shu*, documental; *shi*, poetical; *yi*, divinatory; and *chunqiu*, chronological) are de facto *histories* (*liujing jieshi*), historiography is indeed regarded

[1]Paradigm is a pattern that recurs in a certain type of discourse, and helps formulate its meaning. According to Kuhn (1970: 113), a paradigm has little to do with the subject-matter, but much to do with the groups of participants.

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Y. Zhao, *The River Fans Out*, China Academic Library,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6_7

as the paramount paradigm to all cultural discourses, occupying the supreme position resembling religious canonized texts in other cultures. This almost absolute domination of historiography exercises great pressure on all genres of discourses, élite genres included. In poetry, for instance, historical allusions are so extensive that they take on an over-coding,[2] making it interpretable only to professional readers.

The pressure from historiography was strongly felt even in literary-language fiction, the only narrative genre other than history among all the culturally privileged genres. Writers of literary-language stories prided themselves on being capable of "supplementing the official histories". Most of the salient narratological characteristics of literary-language stories are ascribable to this emulation of historiography. Always supposed to be recounting anecdotes of real persons, the literary-language story starts with a formulaic short summary of the protagonist: his home town, and the date of the incident. At the end (or less often, at the beginning) of the story, a super-narrative is installed where the narrator, inevitably adopting the name of the author, can come out with comments in the same manner as historians commenting on the historical character at the end of his biography.

If élite genres feel the pressure so strongly, for a discourse in as low a position as vernacular fiction, the emulation of historiography is virtually compulsory.

To praise fiction works as being "history-like" became the regular commendatory term among Chinese fiction writers and critics. Ge Hong of the fourth century, one of the earliest Chinese fiction writers, claimed that his collection of stories, *Miscellaneous Notes from the West Capital* (*Xijing Zaji*) was compiled from the data left over by the well-known historian Liu Xin, and his book should now be read as a supplement to Liu Xin's history. And indeed *Miscellaneous Notes from the West Capital* was listed under the heading of "history" in the bibliography of the ensuing official dynastic history. Almost 1500 years later, in the eighteenth century, Ji Yun, editor of the *Siku Quanshu Zongmu*, praised Ge Hong's book for exactly the same reason as the writer expected:

> The contents, although fictional, are gathered from a wide range of material. Li Shan used them to annotate *Selection of Refined Literature* (*Wen Xuan*). Xu Jian alluded to them in his *Textbook for Children* (*Chu Xue Ji*). Even Du Fu, who was very strict in verifying his allusions, referred to this book repeatedly. After so many hundreds of years of usefulness we can say that these notes have proved to be well-grounded historical facts, and cannot be easily ignored.[3]

If we remember those unfortunate poets who mistakenly used allusions to vernacular fiction and had to spend the rest of their life in repentance, we can see that the same fabrications in literary-language fiction could be taken as historical facts, at least in poetry. Such is the difference between the two genres of fiction.

Being more subordinate to historiography, the best that vernacular fiction could hope for was actually not to supplement official history (*gu shi*) but to illustrate it

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[2]Over-coding occurs when "on the basis of a pre-established rule, a new rule is proposed which governed a rarer application of the previous rule". (Eco 1976: 133)

[3]Ji Yun 1965: 1182.

(*yutyi xin shi*).[4] Its restriction and its freedom all stem from this role of illustrating history. Xiaohua Zhuren in his preface to the vernacular short-story selection *Marvels Ancient and Modern* (*Jingu Qiguan*) holds, "Fiction is codicillary to history". (JGQG, 5) For this claim, the well-known vernacular fiction writer Zhu Renhuo offers an interesting explanation: "It is very true for our ancestors to think of *The Grand Chronicle* (*Tongjian*) as the great ledger of the past. But there should be both the general ledger and the small items account books. That is why romances about the past dynasties have kept coming up." (Preface, STYY, 4) Here the cultural subordination of fiction is held up as something of which to be proud. With this sense of subordination critics adopted a strange standard for the appreciation of good novels.[5]

Since the emulation of historiography was imperative, studying history was regarded as fundamental training for fiction writers. Luo Ye advised in his *Zuiweng Tanlu*: "Although a lesser scholarship, fiction requires a wider range of learning. [Fiction writers] are not those with scanty knowledge, but should, by necessity, be erudite. When young, they have to study *Taiping Guangji*, and when grown up, they must master histories of all dynasties."[6] This emulation of historiography continued well into the late Qing. Liu E did not care much about his *The Travels of Lao Can* but he declared in a comment made in his own name at the end of Chap. 4: "[These facts] are not known to many people. Fortunately they are recorded in this book, thus providing material for an official historiography to be compiled in the future. So how can we despise fiction?" (LCYJ, 38)[7]

In the late Qing to use a love-story to frame historical events became common practice. The best-known example is *A Flower in the Sinful Sea*, of which the design was "to borrow a character as the thread to knit in *as much as possible* the history of the recent thirty years" (NHH, 56. Italics mine). Other writers soon followed: Lin Shu's *The Stench of the Sword*, Fu Ling's *The Bird that Carries Stone to the Sea* (*Qin Hai Shi*), Zhong Xinqing's *New Dame aux camélias* (*Xin Chahua*), and others. Wu Jianren's *The Sea of Remorse* is a tragic romance of two couples, but A Ying included it in his collection *Literature on the Boxer Rebellion.* It is amazing to see how A Ying neatly collects almost all major late Qing fiction works into volumes on historical topics such as "Opium War", "Boxer Rebellion", "Movement Against the US Exclusion Bill", "1911 Revolution", "Constitutional Movement", etc.

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[4]Plaks points out with acumen that the titles of almost all literary-language stories are bound to sound as if they should be read as historiography, e.g. *Zhuan, Zhi, Ji.* (Plaks 1977: 312) Most vernacular fiction works, though not all, followed this practice.

[5]As late as 1897, Qiu Weihuan in his *Shuyuan Zuitan* still held: "The best fiction is those works which record facts and can stand verification. Fiction works dealing with foxes or ghosts, or relating folklore, are like chess, only for time-killing. They can never hope to compare with those recording facts and discussing reasonable matters."

[6]Luo Ye, 1957: 3.

[7]Another interesting case was Lin Shu, who repeatedly expressed a similar hope of contributing to official history. In his preface to *Jiewai Tanhua* he hoped that "Probably these things can serve as materials when an official history is compiled." But when he was invited to be an Honorary Compiler of *The History of the Qing*, he declined, acknowledging that he was only good at "unofficial history" (*yeshi*).

Indeed, in late Qing fiction, the emulation of historiography becomes something of an infatuation with historiography. In Chen Tianhua's *The Lion Roars*, which recounts the imaginary history of an island Utopia, there are some very strange passages:

> Wen Mingzhong… made up another song and taught his students to sing it every day, it runs: (The lyric of the song is missing in the manuscripts, so we have to leave it out).
>
> Suddenly there came a lumberman who was singing while walking (The lyric of the song is missing). (SZH 597, 612)

The brackets are added by the modern editors. However, it is very difficult to find an explanation for those statements with or without brackets. Chen Tianhua could well have left out those lyrics, as the narrative selectivity enables him not to cite the lyric in the first place. If he did not have the time or patience to make these two lyrics (he did compose some lyrics in the novel), his pretext could only make things Worse.

What he seems to me to be trying to achieve is to create an impression that everything about this island is faithfully recorded, so that if there is something missing, its absence should still be mentioned, just as m a history.

The reason why such an infatuation with historiography culminates in the late Qing is not hard to find: the social significance imposed upon fiction by Liang Qichao and other champions of "New Fiction" was more than fiction could bear, and forced fiction to draw support by means of the emulation of historiography.[8]

II

Imaginative discourses are unprivileged in Chinese discursive hierarchy because Confucius declared in *The Analects* (*Lun Yu*) that he "refrains from talking about the abnormal, the supernatural, the magic, or the weird". In order to make possible the necessary fictionality, it is necessary to find a justification within the dominance of the

[8] Some authors by the late Qing apprehended the basic contradiction between historicity and fictionality. In the historical novel *A Romance for the Leisure Time* (*Xiaoxian Yanyi*), which was written around 1920 but is still justifiably included by A Ying in his collections of late Qing fiction, there are a great many contradictory narratorial directions about historicity and fictionality. Let me select only a few:

> Fictionality is most misleading. In this novel of mine no groundless fictionality would be tolerated, and no libel allowed to appear. If you do not believe me, you can examine it carefully and see that every word I say is true to facts. (A Ying 1959: 337)
>
> My dear readers, don't you think that the passage above is really interesting? But people all say that historical novels are composed of events taken from historical documents. Then from where did I copy that passage? Haha! Let me tell you: this is sheer fabrication made by me. (Ibid. 437)
>
> Some people would ask how could I say that this minister was killed by the Boxers as he was actually executed by an imperial order? Here is my answer: the proper method of fiction writing is that so long as it does not go far off the track, let it be as interesting as possible. We should not be too fussy over facts. The purpose of romance is to let you readers know that evil would never go unpunished. (Ibid. 405)

historical paradigm. Feng Menglong, in his preface to *Stories Ancient and Modern* (*Gujin Xiaoshuo*),[9] makes this interesting statement, "When historicity dwindles, fiction arises." (*shitong san er xiaoshuo xing*) And he goes on to point out the true lineage of Chinese fiction: "It started in the time of Zhou but flourished in the Tang period. In the Song, it went into full blossom. Han Fei, Lie Yukou and others should be considered the ancestors of fiction."[10] Feng Menglong shows acumen in tracing the source of the imaginative paradigm to texts regarded as heretical by the orthodox Confucianists.

Another way to justify fiction is to prove that fictionality is a mode of signification entirely different from historiography. Nevertheless, there has never been in Chinese thinking a proposition distinguishing historicity from fictionality like that put forward by Aristotle which became the starting-point of Western literary philosophy. The Aristotelian proposition, though simple in wording, produced a series of significant philosophical and aesthetic conclusions: the proposition leads to the superiority of poetry over historiography. This is not only because history is related to what has happened and literature with what could have happened, and not only because history deals with the particular and poetry with the universal, but more importantly, because literature is closer to truth than the narrated historical events.[11]

The absence of an Aristotelian-like proposition in Chinese philosophy reveals some important aspects of Chinese discursive structure: actuality is stored only in history, which, although managed by Heaven, is also in keeping with the basic structural rules of society (i.e. the celebrated credo *Tian Ren Heyi*, Heaven and Men are one). The singular (i.e. the "actual facts") is thus imbued with the absolutism of truth, and is by definition superior to fiction based on probability whose agreement with the universal truth has yet to be proved. What has happened, as recorded in historiography, is always superior to what might have happened (as depicted by fiction), and the generic priority of historiography is unquestionable.

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[9]This preface was written by Lutianguan Zhuren, which, according to Sun Kaidi, was Feng Menglong's pen-name. (Sun Kaidi, 1931: 45)

[10]Han Fei was one of the leading rivals of the Confucian school in the pre-Qin era, and his philosophical writings, collected together as the *Han Fei Zi*, are full of imaginative fables. Lie Yukou, the alleged author of the collection of stories and fables in Lie Zi, was probably the earliest Chinese fiction writer. Those two authors can be said to represent the non-Confucian non-historiographical discourses in early Chinese culture, though we may suggest that the Taoist writings by Zhuang Zi provided more food for Chinese imaginative thought, and Buddhist discourses, which came into China in the first or second centuries AD, greatly reinforced Chinese imaginative power.

[11]Louis Mackey in "Poetry, History, Truth and Redemption" (in Schulze and Weltzels 1978: 66–7) tries to draw a logical inference from the Aristotelian proposition. What Aristotle really meant, he suggests, was that "the difference between history and poetry is a difference between the modalities of their discourses. History is written in the indicative mode, the mode of assertion and matter of fact. But poetry, at its most philosophical, is in the mode of necessity, and, at its least philosophical, in the mode of probability and possibility." And his conclusion is this: "Poetry is more philosophical than history only on the condition that possibility (fiction in the 'what if' sense of imaginative hypothesis: likelihood poised in stable equilibrium between probability and dissimilarity) is closer to necessity than actuality is." Therefore, the Aristotelian conception serves as the basis on which later critics developed the idea of poetic truth. Allen Tate, for instance, developed his cognitive poetics along this line. (1955: 24–45)

Meng Liang Lu, one of the first *biji* collections that mentions oral fiction narratives, vaguely suggests a comparison by saying, "Stories (*xiaoshuo*) can tell the history of a dynasty or an era, and in a moment bring them to an end (*niehe*)."[12] Although this is a comparison between two sub-genres of oral narratives, not exactly an Aristotelian comparison between fictionality and historicity, it already touches upon the possible way to argue for the superiority of fictionality over historiography. Jin Shengtan was one of the first to put forward a proposition in this direction: "The creativity [*xu*] of the historian is to handle events by means of narrative [*yi wen yun shi*]; whereas the creativity of the fiction writers is to fabricate events for the sake of narrative [*yin wen sheng shi*]."[13]

This comparison, after all, only reveals differences in the scope of the two genres, emphasizing that fiction enjoys a much greater freedom. But freedom is not truth value. Zhang Zhupo tried another argument for fiction's alleged superiority:

> *Jin Ping Mei* is another *Grand History* (*Shi Ji*). But in the *Grand History* there are separate biographies and treatises for each person and each important subject-matter, while in *Jin Ping Mei* the one hundred chapters comprise a single biography of hundreds of characters, who share the one biography, while each one has his own story. That is why the author of *Jin Ping Mei* was definitely able to write a *Grand History*. How can I be so sure? Since he was capable of the more difficult he was naturally capable of the easier. (JPM, p. vi)

Although boldly in favor of fiction, his enthusiasm for fiction is based on the difficulty of technique alone, and is hardly a philosophical argument.[14]

Perhaps Yuan Yuling's argument is the only one in Chinese theoretical thinking that approaches an Aristotelian proposition:

> Literature without imagination (*huan*) is not literature. Imagination without going to extremes is not imagination. So we know that the most extreme imagined thing in the world is also the truest thing; and the *most imaginative argument is the truest argument*. That is why talking about reality is less worthy than talking about imagination, just as talking about Buddha is less worthy than talking about a demon. The demon is no one else than myself.[15]

Yuan Yuling does not launch a challenge to the dominance of historiography, and his words read like a statement instead of a theoretical argument. Yet this seems to be the highest understanding ancient Chinese fiction critics reached on the nature

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[12] Wu Zimu, 1980, 196. *Ducheng Jisheng*, another early *biji* book that discusses oral fiction narrative has almost exactly the same words with the last word *niehe* changed to *tipo*, which can be roughly translated as "breaking suddenly onto the truth".

[13] Huang Lin and Han Tongwen 1982: 254.

[14] One of Feng Menglong's arguments more or less in the same vein is seen in his preface to *Jingshi Tongyan* which dared not declare the superiority of fiction: "Should fiction be all real? I say. 'Not necessarily'. Should it be all false? I say, 'Not necessarily'. Then should we delete the false and retain only the real? I say, 'Not necessarily'… Real events with truth in them are the same as unreal events with some truth in them, doing no harm to morality, giving no opposition to the sages, posing no contradiction to the canons and histories. Why should such books be abandoned?" Such arguments do not uphold the superiority of fiction over historiography, and in fact the conformity with historiography is listed as one condition of the *raisons d'être* for fiction.

[15] Introduction by Yuan Yuling under the pen-name Manting Guoke to the end of *The Journey to the West* annotated by Li Zhuowu. Quoted in Sun Kaidi 1931: iv. 77. Italics mine.

of fiction, although a little vague in argument, as perhaps an argument deviant to the norms had to be. It is regrettable that no modern scholar seems to have paid attention to Yuan Yuling's highly interesting argument on the paradox of the truth value of imagination in literature, and his penetrating insight in an almost heretical presentation.

Late Qing fiction criticism, to our great regret, does not even arrive at Jin Shengtan's understanding, let alone Yuan Yuling's. Yan Fu and Xia Zengyou in their well-known 1897 essay first touch the topic: "A book recording people and events is history; a book recording people and events that might not actually have happened is fiction."[16] Five years later, Xia Zengyou published another article "Principles of Fiction" and reiterates the same proposition, but with a much more feeble explanation, which shows that he fails to come close to an Aristotelian understanding: "Fiction is the writing about the already-known truth in detail, thus it is superior. History is the writing about the already-known truth in succinct terms, and therefore is inferior to fiction." (XXXS, 1903) Again this is a comparison of some specific technical device, not a philosophical contemplation on the truth value of the different genres.

The difficulty that Chinese critics faced in this debate is ascribable to the fact that the cultural value of historiography was considered so superior that fictionality could never hope to match it in any way. Any speculation on the comparison was simply groundless, and so far as the cultural structure is concerned, irrelevant. The above-mentioned debate arose only in the discussion of how to handle historical facts (as recorded in official history) in historical novels. It could hardly be serious contemplation upon the truth value of the two genres. In a word, Chinese vernacular fiction can only try to win a limited amount of freedom for imagination.

As a result of this emulation of the historical paradigm traditional vernacular assumes the following narratological characteristics:

> Emulating the historiographer, the status of the narrator in traditional vernacular fiction must be impersonal, never personalized so that his narration can pose as the objective record of actual facts.

Since he is responsible for the factuality of what he relates, the narrator, above the narrated world, intrudes abundantly. His narration is almost always reliable as his task is purportedly to record what has already taken place in history (or, narratologically, in *histoire*—the prenarrated state), and narratorial mediation is apparently reduced to the minimum.

Emulating the historiographer, he generally adopts zero-focalization (the omniscient perspective), and avoids character-focalization, since his main purpose is supposedly to tell as objectively as possible what has really happened. The direct quoted form of reported speech rein-force's the impression of being absolutely factual.

Emulating the historiographer, he pays great attention to time in the narrative, and appears punctilious in indicating the moment of the occurrence of an event, and

[16] "Guowen Bao Fuying Shuobu Yuanqi", repr. in A Ying 1960: i. 13.

meticulous in filling in every link in the temporal chain, making it "time-brimming". He seldom feels the need to use flashbacks in his narration unless two plotlines cross. In order to maintain fundamental suspense, he frequently uses flashforwards, a habitual narrative device in historiography, as flashforwards reinforce the temporal linearity. Also, *ab ovo* beginnings are favored, so that the narrative can be safely anchored in historical context. Emulating historiography, the dominating type of motif tends to be more functional, making the narrative sketchy and speedy.

Although this emulation of historiography in vernacular fiction is similar to that in literary-language fiction in many respects, there are some basic differences. Since literary-language fiction is much higher in the cultural hierarchy, the pressure to emulate historiography is less. The narrator makes fewer commentaries, and in a less intrusive way. Since the narrative frame is not conventionalized, there is more room for verifying the distribution of subjectivity.

It was in the May Fourth period that Chinese fiction was finally relieved from the unbearable pressure of historiography. Anti-historiography became a favorite game among May Fourth writers and critics. Hu Shi, for instance, accused Jin Shengtan of "reading fiction in the same way as reading history, trying to find non-existent hidden meanings".

Lu Xun, in his iconoclastic satire *The True Story of A Q*, dealt this emulation a shattering blow, as the narrator, ironically posing as a historiographer, tries in this short novel to subjugate fictionality with historicity. The short novel starts with a long-winded straight-faced direction discussing what category in the rigid system of Chinese official or unofficial historiography this story of A Q, the homeless farm laborer, should belong to, but finally helplessly gives up.

Then Lu Xun tries to start the story in the conventional *ab ovo* manner-name, birthplace, lineage, etc.—and ends up in despair again that these conventions do not fit A Q's life at all. Historiography is therefore found to be not only useless but also stupid. And the narrator does not let a chance go by without poking fun at the solemnity of historiography:

> Whenever they met, women in the village were bound to talk about how Zhou the Seventh Aunt bought a blue silk skirt from A Q which, though used, cost only ninety cents, and how Zhao-the-White-Eye's mother—Another version says that it was Zhao Sichen's mother, which remains to be verified by future scholarship—also bought a child's crimson silk shirt which was 70% new and cost only 392 coins in cash. (NH, 509)

Zhou Zuoren recalled in his memoirs that the "interweaving of arguments" in *The True Story of A Q* was meant to be a mockery of "the infatuation with history" (*lishi pi*).[17]

However, another story by Lu Xun "The Madman's Diary" can be considered a more devastating blow to the emulation of historiography, not because it condemns the whole history of Chinese civilization as a history of cannibalism, but because of the participant narrator's-the Madman's-particular way of reading historiography:

> I opened the history book to have a careful reading. The history has no chronology. Scrawling on every page are written the four characters "Benevolence and Morality". I couldn't fall

[17] Zhou Zuoren, 1980: 207.

> asleep anyway, so I kept on reading until the small hours before I found out from in between the lines that on every page there was written the word "man-eating"! (NH, 15)

So the truth is not to be found within history but without, where the language of history could hardly reach, that is, the opposite side of what is recorded. In this way Lu Xun drives home a total negation of the history-cult in Chinese culture and a complete refutation of the truth value of this supreme genre in the Chinese discursive hierarchy.[18]

On the whole, the narrator in May Fourth fiction resembled a memoirist or autobiographer more than a historiographer. The truth value of fiction did not lie in its correspondence to facts, or to the probability of facts. Cyril Birch points out that "norm-sharing and communal celebration" is the dominant attitude of Chinese traditional fiction, in contrast to the "individual, relatively alienated" attitude in May Fourth fiction.[19] Since the historiographical paradigm is the supreme embodiment of the discursive norms of Chinese culture, its emulation would necessarily result in a conformity with the norms. Thus, this narrative mode of Chinese traditional fiction should be a *conformable* mode. On the other hand, this norm-sharing forced the narrator to stabilize his conventions, to ensure that the readers join the norm-sharing. That is why his narrative was also in a *communal* mode.

By emulating the prestigious generic paradigms, by complying with the scale of meaning-power, narrative texts under the control of this narrative mode aligned themselves with the cultural norms, thus reinforcing the cultural structure. Moreover, they reinforced the structure "from below" as they were subcultural narrative discourses, and were essentially communal to the broad masses of the lower social strata, thus ensuring a collectivized interpretation. In this way, the narrator of traditional Chinese fiction succeeded in bringing the subculturalness of Chinese vernacular fiction into conformity with the cultural metalingual system.

III

The norms for individual behavior in Chinese society used to be culturally coded in an explicit and unequivocal way. For a fictional narrative text, then, there appears to be little leeway for different moral judgements on the narrated world. Since the moral coding is publicly imposed inclusively on all cultural discourses, fiction was by no means an exception. Nevertheless, because of the particular social position of vernacular fiction, this control could work in a very complicated manner.

If before the twelfth century, there was still a certain degree of ambiguity in the coding for individual behavior as well as that of the characters in the narrated world, after the emergence of Neo-Confucianism in the Song and Ming dynasties, moral coding became almost absolute in controlling the cultural discourses in China.

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[18] It was not until half a century later that Louis Althusser made a similar statement on the relation between texts and history: "On the reverse side of what is written will be history itself" (quoted in Macherey 1966: 28).

[19] Goldman 1977: 391.

This was exactly the time, perhaps not coincidently, of the emergence of Chinese vernacular fiction.[20]

It was Zhou Dunyi, one of the leading Neo-Confucianists, who first put forward the ethical principle for all discourses—"Letters are vehicles for morals" (*wen yi zai dao*).[21] His celebrated statement does not conceal that this doctrine is directed against *belles lettres*—the aesthetic use of literary discourses:

> Letters are to serve as the vehicle for morals. If the wheels and shafts are beautifully ornamented but one cannot drive the chariot, it remains only decoration. Words can be art, but morality [*daode*] is the fruit. It is only because of their love of the fruit that the artists put the words down on paper. As they are beautiful, they are loved. As they are loved, they spread. Thus the wise can learn from them and put them into practice. This is the way of teaching.[22]

This is an extremely pragmatic and teleological doctrine. Artistic merit is regarded as only sugar-coating for morality, making the latter easier to accept. This doctrine became so prevalent after the rise of Neo-Confucianism in China that few discourses in Chinese culture were able to escape it.

The pressure of moral codification on Chinese vernacular fiction is extremely stringent, more stringent than on literary-language fiction, as subcultural discourses are more remote from the moral norms. The more vernacular fiction wants to entertain the masses, the heavier is the normalizing pressure it undergoes. The emergence of the Novels of Manners (*Shiqing Xiaoshuo*), on daily life and sexual relations, resulted in a more stringent implementation of moral codes as seen in Talent and Beauty fiction in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and in Butterfly fiction on the eve of the May Fourth Movement.

We can also find some strange phenomena in Chinese popular literature: the narratives written by women (especially the large number of *tanci* ballads produced in the nineteenth century), while letting their heroines compete with men in all fields, also make them paradoxically ultra-conservative with regard to the feminine virtues, as if to show that women can outdo men in stereotyping women. Most ancient Chinese scholars who cared about popular literature justified their interest in these subcultural discourses by emphasizing their moral-admonitory power.

What is perhaps more thought-provoking is that the novels on licentious sex, considered highly entertaining in the late Ming, are all highly moralistic. In those novels, the lustful heroes and heroines are bound to be punished for their wild sexual escapades. And those novels usually have a very defensive introduction and almost

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[20] The stories purged in modern eds. of some late Ming fiction collections such as Amazing Stories (*Pai'an Jingqi*) were not considered pornographic according to late Ming standards. The notorious obscene story "The Lustful Life of King Hailing" (Hailing Wang Huayin) was anthologized repeatedly from the late Song to the late Ming (story 21 of *Jingben Tongsu Xiaoshuo*, story 23 of *Xingshi Hengyuan*, and possibly other collections) but was purged from all reprints after the early Qing. This shows how the pressure of moral control over sub-cultural discourses had gradually built up in China over the last few centuries.

[21] The *Dao* here used to be translated as "way", the mystic center of Chinese philosophical thinking. But it can also be understood as *daode* (morality), and I think in this case, morality is what Zhou Dunyi had in mind. Indeed he used the word *Daode* in his exposition of the motto.

[22] Zhou Dunyi, 'Tongshu Wenci', in Zhang Shengyi and Liu Jiuzhou 1985: 6.

censorious narratorial intrusions to show that the texts are within the boundaries of morality. Lv tiancheng, author of *The Unofficial History of the Embroidered Bed* (*Xiuta Yeshi*), one of the "most obscene" late Ming novels extant, provides a typical apology for this kind of novel in the preface:

> A friend who dropped by asked, "Aren't you, sir, teaching sexual indulgence?" I said, "No! I am only showing my worry about this world." He asked, "How is that?" I said, "I want to stop the whole world from sexual excess, but as it is already too far gone in that direction, nobody will listen to my advice. If I show them what result may come out of it, and lead them gradually on in the right direction, people can be saved."

The self-justification sounds hypocritical. Yet we can hardly blame the author for being fraudulent. The subcultural discourses, as mentioned in the last chapter, do not have a separate set of cultural values to go by. They have no choice but to accept the dominating morality of society, even though that morality appears to be coded for the interests of the continuous domination of mainstream culture.[23] In Chinese vernacular fiction there is often a paradoxical warning. Ling Mengchu, in the preface to his collection of short stories which contained quite a few licentious descriptions that gave later publishers much headache in purging them, condemned pornographic authors and earnestly suggested to the government a ban on their books. A great many of the narratological conventions in Chinese vernacular fiction are actually inserted and maintained to meet the high moralistic pressure.

In the various documents banning fiction collected by Wang Chuanxiao, we find an interesting document—"Notice of Prohibition in All Villages"—which can be said to be a spontaneous manifestation of the common people (at least local gentry) concerning the popular literature on sexual relations.

> Adultery is the ugliest of all crimes, and licentiousness the foremost of all evils. Yet the opera troupes in our country are fond of staging these ugly sexual stories, in which there is neither a worthy plot, nor retribution to make them acceptable. Only the ignorant masses would go for such enjoyment… Now, in accordance with the official decree, the staging of opera is to be strictly prohibited everywhere.[24]

Such was the Chinese attitude toward fiction: so long as there was some proper retribution in plot and a moral ending to serve as a safety valve, the undesirable subject-matter could be tolerated.

In the flashforward scheme of vernacular Chinese fiction, one thing particularly noteworthy is the formulaic prelude of moral admonition attached to almost all stories

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[23] We can find some interesting passages in Lu Xun's *The True Story of A Q*:

> A Q had some opinions that came from who knows where. He held that to be a revolutionary meant to rebel, and to rebel meant to harm him. Therefore he hated the revolutionaries. (NH, 476)
>
> A Q was an upright person. Though we do not know which wise man was his mentor, he maintained a very strict attitude toward the segregation of men and women, and displayed sufficient rectitude toward heretical people like little nuns or phoney foreign devils. (Ibid. 477)

[24] Wang Chuanxiao, 1958: 119.

and novels to provide some moralizing message before the actual story starts. It is interesting to note that the placing of the moral admonition reverses that in some Western admonitory literary works such as Aesop's fables, which do not try to sum up the moral message until the story is finished. In Chinese culture, the moral is rigidly predetermined disregarding the particular situation, and the story serves only as an illustration.

IV

Thus in vernacular fiction we find two kinds of beginning schemes: to emulate the historiographical paradigm, the *ab ovo* beginning was well installed, so that the historical continuity could be preserved; to facilitate the adherence to the moralistic paradigm, the end-result was carefully stated in the prelude. Indeed the two beginnings often appear together in a fiction work, and we can see that these two paradigms cooperate in determining the narratological features of Chinese vernacular fiction. Most of the conventionalized narratological characteristics are in the service of both of these modes.

The morals preached in the prelude are, like judgemental commentaries, bound to be hackneyed common truths, as vernacular fiction is in no position to be original in moral judgement. The first section of *Zuiweng Tanlu*, entitled "Preludes (Universally Applicable for Either Historical or Moral Fiction)" is meant to be a model that can be readily adapted to any story:

> Since ancient times, people have been divided into grades. The wise are clean and intelligent; the foolish are unclean and muddle-headed. The intelligent know about the *Three Credos and the Five Morals* [San Gang Wu Chang], the muddle-headed commit Five Felonies and take to the *Ten Evils* [Wu Nie Shie]. Good or evil is decided by temperament, and the wise and the foolish are distinct as to be respectable or despicable. Good people are like rice; evil people distress their relatives, as weeds disgust the farmers. Such people are not worth talking to. (Luo Ye 1957, 1)

What calls for attention in this paragraph is not only the crude vulgarization of Confucian ethics, but also the metaphors and the wording it uses to appeal to the common people. The fact that this passage was designed for stories on any subject-matter shows that moralist principle did not have to adapt to the particular story. Rather the story had to adapt itself to the moral principle.

The didactic pressure is much lighter on literary-language fiction. In literary-language literature, there are not so many apparent efforts at moral apology. Description of sexual encounter in plays like *The West Chamber* (*Xixiang Ji*) and in literary-language short stories like *Stories from Liaozhai* (*Liaozhai Zhiyi*), no matter how direct, still remain elegant.

The moral apology, sincere or hypocritical, exists only in subcultural texts which have a double cultural function to perform: they must conform visibly to the dominant norms to avoid self-expulsion from the culture; they must provide entertainment to the popular audience so they could not afford to be prudish. This dilemma is finally demonstrated in the narratological characteristics of vernacular Chinese fiction, especially in the large amount of moral judgemental intrusions.

This ethical subordination was even more obvious in late Qing fiction. *Lives of Shanghai Flowers* (*Hai Shang Hua Lie Zhuan*) for instance, opens with an unabashed statement:

> Since Shanghai was opened to international trading, prostitution has run more and more rampant. Huge numbers of young people meet disastrous ends in bordellos. The warning from their fathers and brothers does not stop them; the advice of their teachers and friends is unheeded. Are they really so obstinate? It is only because there has not been one who could show them his own experience. When these people fall in love passionately, they of course see only the bright side. Once all these scenes are described in detail here, they will be disgusted, and realize that it is a waste of life. Then they will return to normal life. (HSHLZ, 1)

Almost all the late Qing novelists were outspoken moralizers. Wu Jianren declared repeatedly that he was "all for the restoration of the old morality". In his best novel Strange Events, there are some stories about evil-doers receiving retribution by fate. Those stories are so nonsensical that we almost suspect tongue-in-cheek. But we find in his *biji* collection *Wo Foshan Ren Biji*, that those stories were recorded as "real events that I myself witnessed, and rewrote into my novel with only the names changed so as to be lenient to those evil persons already punished in life".[25]

Moralizing is the first and foremost proclaimed aim within a typical "Reprimanding Novel" of the late Qing. Ouyang Juyuan in his preface to Li Boyuan's *The Bureaucrats* states:

> Filial Piety, brotherhood, loyalty, and sincerity are all destroyed at the hand of the officials; rites, honor, decency and uncorruptibility are all ruined by the officials… The author heaved a sigh, "I have no personal relations with the officials. To achieve my goal, all I can do is to be lenient in my description, while throwing out hints on the hidden evils." (GCXXJ, p. iv)

As can be observed from late Qing novels, romance fiction has to try harder to harp on the same moralist string in order to justify its subject-matter and prove that it has no intention to challenge the Chinese ethical codes. Every leisure magazine run by that group spares no effort in emphasizing that its aim is to denounce the degeneration of social *moeurs*, and that for this purpose interesting stories are more effective than direct admonition. The Black Curtain fiction, generally considered as the most degenerate type in late Qing fiction, is also the most markedly moralistic. There are, after every few pages, statements to the effect that the sole purpose of those novels is to reveal the seamy side of society "so that those inside the curtain would fear, and those outside the curtain could be on their guard".[26]

This general reiteration of moralization greatly reinforced the continuity of the narratological characteristics of Chinese traditional fiction. Many of the late Qing novels pin great importance on the moralizing prelude, and judgemental commentaries. Even one of the best late Qing works of fiction, Li Boyuan's *The Bureaucrats* has a prelude introducing, through a character's words, the admonitional purpose of

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[25] Wei Shaochang 1980: 56.

[26] Introduction to the *Omnibus of Chinese Black Curtain Stories* (*Zhongguo Heimu Daguan*, Shanghai: Zhongguo Tushu Jicheng Gongsi, 1920), p. ii.

the novel; Flowers in the Sinful Sea has more than one prelude, deleted only in the revised editions after 1927.

Posing as the moralizer, the narrator stands in a controlling position aloof from the narrated world. Thus he has to remain neither explicit nor implicit. If he is too implicit, his judgemental voice, seemingly coming out of a void, would carry no weight, whereas his judgement would be too personal if he is explicit. As a moralizer, he is justifiably intrusive, inserting judgemental commentaries at every possible moment of the narrative, to preclude a diffusion in interpretation.

Posing as the moralizer, he is straightforward, not allowing his narrative to become unreliable, since any irony encourages diversified interpretation; he must make the best use of his omniscience, so that his complete knowledge of the narrated world may be displayed, and the authority of his moral judgement assured.

Posing as the moralizer, the narrator has to ensure that the temporal-causal chain in the plot is clearly maintained, so that good and evil may be developed to their completion to justify the reward or retribution.[27] He favors flash-forwards in his temporal mediation, since in flash-forward the suspense hangs more on the process leading up to the retribution or reward rather than on whether retribution will eventually come.

V

I mentioned above that the emergence of Chinese vernacular fiction was almost simultaneous with the rise and growing dominance of Neo-Confucianism (Li Xue). No scholar has ever paid attention to this concurrence and its meaning to Chinese culture. In fact, it was not Neo-Confucianism alone but the combined force of it with the rise of vernacular fiction that turned China into what we now usually call "ritual-moralist society" (*Lijiao Shehui*).

Of course Confucianism had all along been an ethics-centered social philosophy, and early Confucianists laid down strict rules for social and family manners. But early Confucianists emphasize that high moral sense is to be expected only from the upper class-the gentlemen (*junzi*), whereas the common people (*xiaoren*) are only encouraged to follow the example set by the upper class. The *Scripture of Rites* (*Li Jing*) and other books stipulating moral behavior, compiled into its present shape around the first century BC, are obviously meant for the members of upper class, as the stringent rules (e.g. the in-laws of different sex are not allowed to talk to each other directly even when dwelling in one household) cannot be followed by common people at all.

So the generic hierarchy of Chinese cultural discourses matched the hierarchy of moral requirements, with the literati to be held as moral examples. That was the price the literati had to pay in order to keep the mandate to rule. The lower classes enjoyed exemptions to different degrees. So long as the exemptions were not expressed in

[27] Macauley and Lanning (1964: 181) provided a clear-cut argument the moral importance of ending: "One of the things that plot leads most powerfully toward is a moral judgment on the people it has dealt with. Even if the judgment is implicit, it is nevertheless there. The very idea of denouement demands a sorting-out of life; a plot cannot end without the assigning of values, without the identification of right and wrong. This, in an abstract way, is what the denouement really is."

significant discourses, e.g. not in written text, they were generally tolerated by the mainstream culture, or even recorded as "exotic local customs".

The Neo-Confucianism that gradually gained control of Chinese spiritual and social life in the Song and the Ming dynasties was basically a fundamentalist movement supported by an exquisite idealist philosophy inspired by Buddhism. It went all out to make Confucian ethics cover lower social strata which had used to be more or less exempt from the restrictions. We may call it a downward extension of moral codes. The rise of Chinese vernacular fiction in the Southern Song period was a part of this movement. The subcultural discourses, now iterated in written form, had to rely heavily on the established moral codes in order to justify themselves. Indeed, vernacular fiction showed a slavishly submissive attitude toward the mainstream moral codes, as discussed above. On the other hand, the downward moral extension movement needed popular genres like vernacular fiction and drama to educate the common people.

During the early years of this fiction, some members of the literati already noticed and highly recommended the moralist fervor of vernacular literature. Yang Weizhen, one of the leaders of the literati in the last years of the Yuan dynasty, pointed out that the zeal of popular dramatists to propagate morality "could make the literati ashamed of themselves".[28] In his preface to the short story collection *Shuo Fu*, he proposed a general scheme for the relationship between various genres:

> All things in this world come together as the city, and the *Five Scriptures* and other texts form the city wall. That is to say the *Five Scriptures* walls in all discourses in the world. If a discourse does not refer to the *Five Scriptures* [*wu jing*], only recording a myriad things happening day and night, what use can it be to Confucian ethics?[29]

Such was the the moral hegemonic structure formulated by Neo-Confucianism where discourses of lower social status have one justification for its existence-their subordination to the canonized texts. It is interesting to note that the high recommendation of the moral usage of subcultural discourses went hand in hand with the warning against any confusion of the generic hierarchy.

Enclosed in the wall of the *Five Scriptures*, nevertheless, the exemptions of subcultural discourses were now greatly reduced. Being placed in the newly acquired semi-literacy, vernacular fiction now no longer enjoyed the freedom of discourses conveyed in orality.

If in the Southern Song this moral extension movement was, generally speaking, not yet an officially endorsed movement, and was anyway cut short by the century of Mongolian rule (1271–1368), the Ming Dynasty, founded by the peasant uprising that toppled the "Barbarians" returned to Confucian social ethics with a vengeance. It laid down an imperial policy to push Confucianist moral codes down to the lowest rung of the social ladder. Starting from the earliest years of the Ming Dynasty, the government-awarded titles for filial sons or chaste women were only granted to

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[28] Yang Weizhen, "Song Zhu Nushi Guiying Yanshi Xu", in Donglai Zi Wenji, Siku Congkan edn. (Shanghai: Hanfeng Lou, 1929), vi. 12.

[29] Ibid. v. 45.

common people, not to literati families, since to behave morally was considered the undeniable duty of the literati and did not need commendation.

The downward moral extension movement, now officially promoted, was so successful that the number of "awarded chaste women" soon became overwhelming, and local histories had to devote many pages to brief accounts of their glorious deaths. So eagerly did common people crave for moral commendation that the government had to make the bureaucratic procedure difficult so as to discourage the applicants. As a result, women tried harder to die for moral principles in all imaginable ways, and the male members of the family would spend their whole fortune and time in fighting through the procedure.[30]

The immensely successful extension of the coverage of moral codes inevitably attenuated morality and made it hypocritical. More importantly, the literati whose class-privilege moral adherence used to be, now found morality distasteful and vulgar. That was at least part of the reason why some deviant members of the literati took vernacular fiction writing. Some of the most notoriously licentious novels, e.g. *Jin Ping Mei* and *Flesh Prayer Mat* (*Rou Putuan*), were said to be, and indeed read like, works authored by scholars. No matter whether the novels the scholar-authors produced were sexually explicit or not, their engagement in vernacular fiction writing itself was an act that confounded the social norms, even if it did not alter the subculturalness of Chinese vernacular fiction, as I have discussed in previous chapters.

So while the vogue of dying for morality ran rampant in villages and small towns, the bookshops in cities exhibited a large number of novels that indulged in explicit sexual descriptions. This paradox was but natural as the pyramid of moral strictness was now turned almost upside down.

This might not be a bad thing, as when part of the élite was trying to reconsider the established norms, the cultural structure could then acquire the flexibility necessary for a cultural reorientation. Regrettably, the hurricane of peasant uprising of the mid-seventeenth century swept away the Ming Empire together with any social order. The Manchus took the opportunity to fill in the power vacuum and, largely for the purpose of justifying a non-Chinese regime, tried fervently to re-establish the Confucian ideology and social order. In this way, the Qing continued the downward moral extension movement while successfully disciplining the élite. Due to severe legal punishment, sexually explicit literature virtually disappeared from bookshops by the end of the seventeenth century.

The present book does not intend to go deeply into the complicated problem of Chinese licentious literature (either in the literary language or in the vernacular) of the seventeenth century. To handle that problem would require a book-length study. I will here only point out that the Neo-Confucianist effort to make the whole of Chinese society moral played an important role in the rise and development of Chinese vernacular fiction in the following two ways: the necessity of educating the common people facilitated the prosperity of vernacular fiction during the Rewriting

[30]For a detailed description of the situation, please see T'ien Ju-k'ang 1988.

period; the excess of the movement could have prompted some deviant sections of the literati class into the subcultural discourses, thus pushing Chinese vernacular fiction into its Creative period.

VI

The only choice left for subcultural discourses, if they were to win some leeway from the dominant value-system of mainstream culture, was to emphasize their purpose of entertaining the masses. The first critic who openly praised the ludic elements in popular literature was Xie Zhaozhi, the late Ming critic and connoisseur of vernacular fiction. He holds in his *Five Miscellanies* (*Wu Zazu*): "All fiction works or *Zaju* plays should mix fictionality with reality to achieve a style of playful enjoyment. The descriptions should go as far as their own worth carries them, without caring whether they are real or riot."[31]

After him, a more competent critic Ye Zhou proposes an advocation of playfulness (*xi*) and amusement (*qu*). One of his comments on *Water Margin* runs:

> There was a village pedant who said that Li Kui was too fierce in killing Luo the Taoist, while Luo was too un-Taoist in lacerating Li Kui. This kind of comment is no more than farting. No part in *Water Margin* can be compared with this chapter, since every part and indeed every sentence of it is full of playfulness. Amusement is the first and foremost criterion for discourses all over the world. So long as there is amusement, what does it matter if the events and persons are real or not? Those who try to find out whether they are real or not are simply idiots![32]

This advocacy of playfulness is an escape from the frustrating problem of the truth value of fiction, as this problem is insoluble within the discursive structure of Chinese culture, where truth values were predeterminately assigned to the specific genre according to their status in the generic hierarchy.

Ye Zhou's stand-insisting on the "subculturalness" of the communal discourses while at the same time refusing to emulate the culturally superior genres-is self-contradictory, and not feasible in traditional Chinese culture. This is because in Chinese society, the pyramidic structure produces more intense pressure on discourses at the lower levels. So long as vernacular fiction is still regarded as one of the lowest communal discourses, the practitioners (both writers and readers) will not feel safe with the entertainment without the support of the established value systems. No wonder this argument on amusement did not win much support during the three centuries of the Qing Dynasty.

But weariness with the indigestible didacticism of late Qing Political or Reprimanding fiction meant that amusement became the key note in Butterfly fiction. The leading magazines of Butterfly fiction flaunt their playfulness. Their titles, *Playful Magazine* (*Youxi Zazhi*), *Saturday* (*Libai Liu*), etc. blatantly claim themselves as no more than diversions. The Publication Note of the most important of the Butterfly magazines, Saturday, is a rather revealing statement:

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[31] Huang Lin and Han Tongwen 1982: 78.

[32] Ibid. p. ix.

> People say, "There are so many enjoyable things to do on Saturday afternoons. Why not go to the theater for opera, or to the wine-tavern to get drunk, or to a bordello for a smile? Why should we come instead to buy your fiction?" My answer is "The bordello costs more; drunkenness harms the health; opera is noisy. Reading fiction is then the most economical and enjoyable pastime."[33]

This is a frank admission of the subculturalness of vernacular fiction, as it unequivocally puts itself on a par with other subcultural discourses.

Soon there appeared in Saturday the ill-fated advertising motto invented by a few Butterfly writers: "You'd rather give up your concubine than give up Saturday", which was seized on by their May Fourth opponents as clear evidence of the degenerate nature of old-type fiction.

The first cry of protest of the May Fourth writers against traditional literature, nevertheless, is against its moralist paradigm. Chen Duxiu says in "On Literary Revolution" ("Wenxue Geming Lun"): "Literature is definitely not the vehicle for morality."[34] Liu Bannong echoes him and emphasizes, "They [literature and morality] can never be mentioned in the same breath."[35] Their principle of separatism was enthusiastically responded to by many May Fourth writers. We need mention only the statement made by Yu Dafu who argued that, "The artistic value of fiction is entirely determined by truth and beauty… As for social or ethical values, no author should care about them when writing."[36] Naturally it was not these statements (which might be shared by all May Fourth writers) but the writing practice of May Fourth fiction that transformed the cultural paradigm of the narrative texts.

VII

Self-expression has always been an important element in Chinese classical literary theory and practice. The problem is that it is reserved only for some literati genres (e.g. poetry and *belles lettres*). It does not even reach the literati narrative genres (*chuanqi* drama and literary-language fiction). The *Gong'an* school of poets in the late Ming and the *Xingling* school of the early *Qing* who upheld self-expression in poetry as the criterion for good literary works, never applied this doctrine to popular fiction, though some of the members (e.g. the Yuan brothers) showed a keen interest in vernacular fiction.

For Chinese vernacular fiction, there was never a proposal for a self-expressive paradigm, because it was virtually never free from communal subculturalness. Self-expression is hardly compatible with a whole set of narratological conventions of Chinese traditional fiction apart from some eighteenth-century masterpieces. It is not

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[33] *Libai Liu*, l, no. I (1914) 2. Shen Yanbing, as one of the most serious attackers of Butterfly fiction, insisted that *Mandarin Duck and Butterfly* (Yuanyang Hudie Pai) was a misnomer, and the group should be called the *Saturday School* (Libai Liu Pai), for, as he observed, some of its writers wrote on themes other than love stories. They tried to widen the scope of their subject-matter, esp. after 1919, but their guide-lines remained the same. (Mao Dun, 1981: 172)

[34] X N, Feb. 1917.

[35] Ibid. Apr. 1917.

[36] Yu Dafu. 1927: 78.

until the May Fourth period that self-expression becomes the most important guiding principle for fiction writing.

Most literary historians hold that realism is the mainstream in May Fourth fiction, and that individualistic self-expression, if any, is mainly to be found in May Fourth poetry. It is, however, the self-expressive paradigm that makes May Fourth fiction unique in the history of Chinese fiction.

There are, to be sure, realistic elements in May Fourth fiction, but they are of lesser importance in this period than the self-expressive elements. A fully fledged realism did not appear until after the May Fourth period, in the early 1930s. The majority of May Fourth writers, especially in the early years, are eager for self-expression, giving barely enough thought as to how to reflect reality. Yu Dafu sums up the situation: "One of the greatest achievements of the May Fourth Movement is the discovery of individualism. Before that time, to be a man is to live for the Heavenly Truth (Dao), for the emperor, or for one's parents. From now on one is determined to live for himself".[37] And Lu Yin, when she took up her pen to write fiction, found that "I did not know what to write, apart from writing about myself myself",[38] and felt that fiction was only "a symbol of my own personality".

It might be said that such statements are made by some writers known for their distinct individualistic stand, but Chen Duxiu, the leading thinker of the period, emphasizes that individualism is the primary principle of the new era: "As individuals, we live in this world to create happiness, and to enjoy happiness, and endeavor to preserve this happiness in society so that the future generations may enjoy it and pass it on to others." (XQN, iv., n. 2) Lu Xun with his strong sense of social responsibility, also asserted this self-expressive principle. As early as 1907, he said that literature "has nothing to do with the survival of individuals or nations",[39] which is an extremely bold declaration in the late Qing. He thinks that in writing, one should "cry like nightingales if you are nightingales; cry like owls if you are owls".[40] He acknowledged that he began writing fiction only because "these memories… torment me and I am unable to forget them completely".[41] In the 1927 heat of revolutionizing the Chinese nation, he insists: "Good works of art never obey orders from others, as they come out naturally from the heart. If you first give yourself a theme before writing, what you produce will not be far from the Civil Service Examination papers."[42] Not long before his death, in the thick of the Left-Wing literature in 1935, he still told one of his young disciples that so long as an artist "expresses what he has experienced, his works would be good… if you try to be purposeful, what you produce cannot be genuine and pro-found, and cannot be art

[37] Zhao Jiabi, 1935: Volume 2 of Essays, p. iii.

[38] Lu Yin, 1934: 80.

[39] "Defending the Poetry of the Moloch" (Moluo Shi Lishuo), in Lu Xun 1956: i. 71.

[40] Wild Grass (Yecao), in Lu Xun 1956: ii. 285.

[41] "Preface to *Battlercries*" (Nahan zi Xu), in Lu Xun 1956: i. 89.

[42] "Literature in the Era of Revolution" (Geming Shidai de Wenxue), in Lu Xun 1956: iii. 418.

at all."[43] Again, emotionally self-restrained writers like Bing Xin also declared, "Literature that expresses the self is good literature."[44]

The motto "all literature is autobiographical in nature" successively endorsed by Saint-Beuve, Georg Brandes, and Anatole France won an enthusiastic response from many May Fourth writers. In fact the majority of the fictional works produced in this period by writers of all coteries or inclinations are autobiographical to some degree. The fact that many works of May Fourth fiction were apparently auto-biographical can be verified not only through the biographical data of the authors but through the style, the tone of the fiction etc. But the most important intrinsic feature that points to this tendency is the narratological transformation, which replaces the conventional non-participant narrator with the individually characterized narrator. The social position of fiction was, then, completely changed, as the personalities of the authors were now pretentiously exhibited, as a matter of pride, as a daring gesture to challenge the cultural norms. Yu Dafu's relentless self-exposure in his fiction won him a large following at the time, and writers vied with each other in writing themselves into their fiction. The absence of any structure in Guo Moruo's short novel *The Trilogy of Wandering* (*Piaoliu Sanbuqu*) hints that it is a hardly fictionalized record of a passage of his own life turned directly into fiction. Zhou Quanping turned his own love and hatred into an epistolary short novel, *The Interflow between Love* and *Blood* (*Ai yu Xue de Jiaoliu*); Ni Yide, a painter-writer, subtitled his best story "Autumn on Xuanwu Lake" (*Xuanwu Hu zhi Qiu*) as "The Diary of a Painter". This trend finally became known as "Fiction of One's Own Life" (*Shenbian Xiaoshuo*).[45]

Thus, the basic discursive mode of Chinese fiction changes from the communal to the personal. Individual experience becomes the focus of attention. As Yu Dafu argues, the shift of attention in fiction from the crowded streets and alleys to people's mental state is an indication of "the real beginning of modern fiction".[46]

VIII

Perhaps as a symbol, perhaps as an essential element for self-expression, sexual relations become almost the central theme of the literature of the May Fourth period. According to an article by Shen Yanbing which cites statistics on fictional works appearing in three months of 1921, 98 per cent are on sexual relations, and he draws the following conclusion: "Most authors are distant from the life of the laboring masses in the city and the countryside, and pay little attention to social events. What interests them most is love, and the tendency of *individualistic* epicurism is more than apparent." (XSYB 12, no. 8).

Yu Dafu is undeniably the best representative of the theme in the May Fourth period. His works touch on almost every "deviant" aspect of sex: voyeurism in "Sinking", homosexuality in "A Night Too Long" (Man Man Ye) and "The Sunset"

[43] *Letter to Li Hua* on 4 Feb. 1935. Lu Xun 1956: x. 256.

[44] Bing Xin, "Wenyi Congtan" (Talking about Art and Literature), XSYB 12, no. 4.

[45] Zhao Jiabi, 1935: Volume 3 of Fiction, p. v.

[46] Yu Dafu, 1978: 189.

(Luori); fetishism and masochism in "The Past" (Guoqu); and confessional impulse in "The Late Osmanthus" (Chi Guihua).

Addictive whoring appear in Lin Ruji's "All Will Be Past"(Jiang Guoqu), Yu Dafu's "The Cold Night" (Han Ye) and "The Street Lamp" (Jie Deng), lesbianism in Ye Shengtao's "The One Forgotten" (Bei Wangque de), incestuous love between sister and brother in Ye Lingfeng's "The Night When Sister Married" (Zi Jia Zhi Ye), love between brother and sister-in-law in Xiang Liangpei's "Vague Dream" (Piaomiao de Meng), and suppressed infant sexuality in Guo Moruo's "Late Spring" (Can Chun) and "The Grave of Ye Luoti" (Ye Luoti Zhi Mu).

The masochistic tendency is most romantically demonstrated in Teng Gu's "The Mural" (Bihua): a Chinese student in Japan is in love with a Japanese woman but too introverted to take any action. Finally, before his death, with the blood he spits out, he paints upon the wall a dead body on which a woman is dancing.

This concern about every aspect of sexual relations in May Fourth fiction is very different from the themes of sexual relations in traditional Chinese vernacular fiction-notably the *Xiaxie* (prostitution) fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and Butterfly fiction of the early twentieth century. Both *Xiaxie* fiction and Butterfly fiction indulge in the "lofty sentiment" and chastity of both sides, with much emphasis on how the lovers are tormented by their attachments to each other, and how they restrain themselves within the Confucian moral code. The actual description of a sexual encounter is avoided so that the lovers seem to be doing nothing much more than exchanging elegant poems or shedding tears. In the eyes of the May Fourth writers, such treatment is shamelessly timid and hypocritical. The traditional code controlling the behavior of the lovers—the motto "Start with desire but halt in accordance with the Rites", which all Talent and Beauty fiction and Butterfly fiction never violate—is contemptuously discarded in most works of the May Fourth period.[47] Sex, which used to be the testing-ground for the subcultural manœuvring—to be entertaining while staying conformable to norms—of traditional fiction now seems to be the breakthrough point for the self-exhibitive challenge launched by May Fourth fiction.

The new openness is by no means without expense. May Fourth fiction on the sex-theme seems to suffer from a overwhelming sense of guilt. The subjective persona (writers, narrators, and characters) are members of the élite class who had been brought up in due respect to the traditional norms which they now find incompatible with the self-expressive impulse. Since these young intellectuals have been uprooted from their native soil, their sense of traditional morality is sufficiently loosened. Their moral responsibilities, which as élite members of society they are unable to ignore, add to their guilty conscience, as can be clearly seen in Yu Dafu's "Niaoluo Xing" which tells how the narrator-protagonist sends away his wife whom he does not love, only to suffer more severe remorse.

[47]In some May Fourth stories, this "rule of decency" is still adhered to. In Feng Yuanjun's best story "Luxing", a college girl-student goes on a trip to a hotel with a married man. The two, it is said, embrace on the bed every night without "going over the boundary".

Thus, psychological impediments in dealing with sex become the central theme instead of sex itself, while in Talent and Beauty novels and Butterfly novels, the impediment to love is always social. This accounts for the fact that in May Fourth fiction the openness does not lead to a hedonistic attitude toward sex,[48] and is partly why the tragic and the melancholic becomes the major tone in May Fourth fiction. The tragic tone used to be found only in literati genres of Chinese literature like poetry or prose but was rare m subcultural genres.

The protagonist in Yu Dafu's celebrated long story "Sinking" is a typical victim of this moral conflict. Each time after masturbating, he recalls the Confucian teaching of "not harming any part of your body since it is given to you by your parents". Self-reproach makes his hypochondria more serious, and leads to his final collapse. Commenting on this type of theory, Shen Yanbing picked a phrase from another story of Yu's—"the anxiety for good and the agony resulting from desire for evil", and held that this was the "common sentiment of all modern youth." (WXXK, Aug. 1,1922). This feeling of norms lost, of being caught in the conflict between the old and the new results in an overwhelming sentiment of melancholy.

Feng Zhi in an article recalled that it was the melancholic note in Lu Xun's stories that struck him and other young people of the time:

> The fiction works that we [members of The Sunk Bell Society] discussed most were not *The True Story of A Q* or "New Year's Sacrifice" though they may be the most profound of Lu

[48]The May Fourth writers were drawn to the newly developed Western psychological approaches to literature. Freud's theories were known and put into practice by authors like Lu Xun and Guo Moruo who had studied medicine abroad. Lu Xun stated clearly that in writing the story "The Buzhou Mountain" (Buzhou Shan) he was "using Freud to explain and create the beginning of humankind and literature". In another essay (After the Setback, [Pengbi Zhiyu], in Lu Xun 1956: iv. 67) he celebrated the victory of Freud: "After the paranoid Mr Freud propagated his psychoanalytic theory, the cloaks of many gentlemen were tom to pieces."

> Guo Moruo, in an article "Piping yu Meng" (Criticism and Dream) tries to defend the sexual perversities in his fiction by saying, "The psychology I describe is a flowing of subconsciousness." (Guo Moruo 1979: 68) In the same article he used more explicit Freudian terms of phallic fantasy to explain his own story "Late Spring" (Can Chun): "In a dream M and S met on Mount Pen-Upright, which was a dream-manifestation of the desire he had not been able to satisfy during the day." (Ibid. 89)
>
> But most May Fourth writers were more familiar with Havelock Ellis than Freud who, after all, was by that time not yet widely accepted even in psychological circles in the West. The abridged version of Ellis's gigantic Studies in the Psychology of Sex had at least three translations in China. Zhou Zuoren said that after reading Ellis's book in its 7-vol. original he suddenly felt that he had been awakened: "This was my revelation. I felt that the scales covering my eyes all dropped away, and I came to a good understanding of society and life." (Zhou Zuoren 1980: 108)
>
> If we remember that Ellis's great book was banned by the British courts at the time, and accessible only to medical professionals, we can understand how closely the May Fourth writers were following the developments in the West.

> Xun's works. We sympathized more with Lu Weipu of "In the Tavern"s, Wei Lianyu of "The Misanthrope", and Juansheng in "Regret for the Past".[49]

This can be confirmed by Lu Xun's own admission: "Excessive melancholic sentiment is common to intellectuals, I have too much of it, and perhaps shall not be able to free myself from it in the rest of my life."[50]

Melancholy permeated May Fourth fiction. The first line of Yu Dafu's celebrated "Chenlun" runs "Lately, he had been feeling lonely, pitiably lonely." In Yu's another story "A Night Too Long", the protagonist (with the name Zhifu reminiscent of Yu's own name) finds everything saturated with sorrow: "the Fatherland on the verge of collapse, mankind on the verge of extinction, the night that seems unending, the autumnal star that is so far away, are all seeds of sorrow." (CL, 121) And in an essay entitled "A Feeble Sound in the Northern Country", (Beiguo de Weiying) Yu offered a curiously modern, even existentialist explanation for this almost self-destructive melancholy: "The desperate loneliness is the only solid sensation we mankind can feel from birth to death." (CZZK, no. 46)

Almost all the May Fourth writers were given to sorrowfulness, though writers of different temperaments offered different explanations. Chen Fangwu, the outspoken apologist for romanticism, for instance, replied to his friend Yu Dafu in an article "The Spring News from the Southern Country" (Jiangnan De Chunxun), "You said that all actions are motivated by this feeling of 'loneliness'. I would rather say that revolt against this feeling of 'loneliness' is the main motive force." (CZZB, n. 48) Rebels or not, both of them are right in the sense that the tragic is part of the definition of the counter-culturality, as the deviant sector of the élite is alienated from the conventional social structure. The writers are left alone in the world, stripped of all normal or communal protection.

Thus, the self-expressive narrative mode finally enabled Chinese fiction to break away from the subcultural conformable and communal modes. The narrator no longer acts as a historiographer, nor poses as moralizer, but becomes something of a memoirist and autobiographer. This makes not only possible but necessary the following narratological characteristics:

> No longer conventionally semi-implicit impersonal, he ceases to be aloof above the narrated world but either sufficiently self-characterized to give himself a self to express, or sufficiently implicit so as to allow his characters to be self-expressive. As the conventional narrative set-up is dismantled, the narrator's commentaries, having lost authority over the characters and events narrated, are reduced to the minimum.

The varying forms of reported speech, the infrequent but never stereotyped stratification, and the effective use of character-focalization, facilitate the dissolving of rigid conventionality, so that the distribution of subjectivity could be arranged with greater freedom.

The well-preserved linearity of temporal mediation in traditional fiction is now replaced by highly elliptical, sectional and retarded narrative time. The dominance

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[49]Feng Zhi, "Preface" to Chen Xianghe Xuanji (*Selected Works of Chen Xianghe*), Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe, 1980, 3.

[50]Lu Xun 1976: i. 533.

of dynamic motifs gives way to static motifs. As a result, the temporal-causal chain is likely to be shattered.

All these new narratological characteristics make May Fourth fiction a discourse fundamentally different from Chinese traditional fiction and can be said to be an answer to the need for the emulation of the self-expressive paradigm, which élitizes Chinese fiction, and even turns it into a serious challenge to the overall structure of Chinese culture.

When the narrator was dislodged from the controlling position in the narrative, taking a centrifugal move towards the isolated personalities, and when the dominance narratorial subjectivity yielded to the freer play of character subjectivity, the position of fiction in the Chinese discursive hierarchy moved out of its communal subculturalness. As this movement was not permitted by the signification system of Chinese culture, Chinese fiction turned itself into an essential part of May Fourth counterculture.

Western Influence on Chinese Fiction

I

One difficult issue for any serious study of late Qing fiction is foreign influence. At first glance this seems to be no problem at all as this influence is virtually omnipresent and undeniable. Yet since late Qing fiction is such a unique mixture of the old and the new, and since the traditional narrative features remained basically unchanged despite foreign influence, there has been much scholarly dispute over the extent and manner of the reception of this influence.

In the late Qing, the authors of the numerous essays calling for a revival of Chinese fiction all emphasized that fiction should play a major role in the development of society, since, as they saw it, it had successfully done so in Western countries and Japan. Liang Qichao said in his first influential essay on fiction "Yiying Zhengzhi Xiaoshuo Xu" (An Introduction to the Translation of Political Novels): "At the beginning of reform in every Western country, leading scholars and enthusiastic reformers often wrote fiction out of their own experience and their political opinions… Often when a novel came out, public opinion within the whole nation completely changed."[51] Liang, however, did not mention the names of those "leading scholars" who had so miraculously changed the taste of the nations with their novels.[52]

[51] Liang Qichao 1941: Book 2, iii. 34–5.

[52] C. T. Hsia once suggested that one of Liang's role models might be Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In another essay he expanded the list to include Bulwer-Lytton, Disraeli, Voltaire, and some Japanese novelists-politicians, well-known at that time. (Hsia 1977: 78)

Although Western literature began to appear in Chinese translation much earlier,[53] it did not attract any serious attention until around 1900 when it began to be published in astonishing quantities. According to A Ying's statistics, among the 1107 books of fiction published between 1882 and 1913, 628—almost two thirds of the total—were translations.[54]

[53] Biblical stories were translated by Western missionaries into Chinese around 1740. In 1871 Wang Tao translated "La Marseillaise", the first Chinese effort at literary translation. In 1872, part of *Gulliver's Travels* was translated, but it was in fact a sinicized retelling of the story. In 1888, Aesop's Fables appeared in a more or less faithful translation.

[54] A Ying 1937: 84.

Chapter 8
Chinese Fiction and Its Narrator

I

Chinese vernacular fiction boasts a history of more than seven centuries, yet what strikes any Western reader is the surprising homogeneity of its narratological characteristics. It is astonishing that fiction should have adhered to a particular set of formulas for so many centuries.

According to many literary historians, Chinese fiction has its source in oral narrative performance, just as in many other cultures. But, unlike the fiction of many other nations, Chinese vernacular fiction retained a series of narratological and stylistic characteristics of oral narrative performance not only after the initial stage but all through the centuries until the early twentieth century. Indeed it was called tale-book (*pinghua*) or prompt-book (*huaben*) for a long time, and narration-book (*shuobu*) in later years.

These seemingly simple and neat names are, however, problematic. The term *huaben* could refer both to a prompt-book produced mainly for the reference of the story-teller, or to a recording of the performance of the story-teller produced for reading.

Many scholars of traditional Chinese fiction seem to be baffled by the problem. Lu Xun, when discussing *The Three Kingdom Pinghua* (*Sanguo Zhi Pinghua*, one novel in *Five Fully Illustrated Pinghua*), says, "From the crudity we can see that it was a *huaben* for the use of oral performers". But he also noted in the same paragraph that the fact that the edition printed during the Yuan dynasty was illustrated indicates that it was meant for reading.[1] Yet he makes the unequivocal statement, "*Huaben* were not [notes of] oral story-telling performance, but retained the style."[2] It seems that he is unsure as to whether *huaben* were the actual notes for oral performance.[3]

[1] Lu Xun 1956: viii. 67.

[2] Ibid. 86.

[3] In Lu Xun (1959) the term *huaben* is translated as "prompt-books" and *ni huaben* as "imitations of prompt-books" wherever they appear.

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Y. Zhao, *The River Fans Out*, China Academic Library,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6_8

Other scholars are less hesitant on this issue. For instance, the chapter on the *huaben* fiction of the Song period in the standard university textbook *History of Chinese Literature* (*Zhongguo Wenxue Shi*) compiled under the chief editorship of You Guo'en begins with the sentence "*Huaben* were originally the notes [*diben*] for oral performers", and throughout the chapter, oral performance and early written vernacular fiction are discussed together without any distinction made between them.[4]

Andrew Plaks insists that such a supposition is only an "idealization that oral story-telling situation is assumed to present the original, radical, unadulterated form of the narrative experience". His argument, however, is based on the fact that oral story performances "appear relatively late in the long narrative tradition, and demonstrate considerable interchange with sophisticated written forms."[5] What he meant by "sophisticated written form" is fiction in the literary language. Like many Western scholars of Chinese literature, he seems to take such fiction as the predecessor of vernacular fiction. As I have already mentioned and shall discuss in more detail below, the two were separated by so wide a cultural gap that vernacular fiction should be considered an entirely new genre and can hardly be considered a continuation of the tradition of literary-language fiction.

The only vernacular narrative texts that can be definitely dated as early the Tang period are the *Bianwen* found in the Dunhuang caves, but they are all written in a vulgarized literary language and none of them is written in a genuine vernacular. Furthermore, they do not have any of the oral narrative characteristics that became the conventions of traditional Chinese fiction. Among the extant texts of *Jiangshi fiction* (historical novels) of the Song and Yuan periods, which is generally considered to retain many of the features of Song oral narrative, is *Forgotten History of the Xuanhe Reign*. Curiously, this is written in a mixed language: the historical events are in the literary language while the legendary events are in the vernacular. Many scholars, therefore, consider it semi-*huaben*. This logic is at fault as the synoptic summary in the literary language of this work is considered to be a true notation of vernacular oral performance whereas the passages written in genuine vernacular are only an imitation.[6]

Nie Gannu discovered that in *huaben* there are actually fewer oral performance characteristics than in *ni huaben* (imitated oral narrative), as those directions of narration are totally unnecessary to the storyteller who knows only too well how and when to insert the conventionalized directions. In written narrative texts, however, such directions become necessary for the purpose of forming a narrative frame simulating oral performance.[7]

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[4] You Guo'en et al. 1979: iii. 144.

[5] Plaks 1977: 70, 327.

[6] Wilt L. Idema divides traditional Chinese vernacular fiction into 2 types: literary novels by literary men, and the less refined "chapbooks" by popular writers. What is interesting are his criteria: literary novels use pure vernacular, while popular chapbooks use simplified literary language. (Idema 1974: p. xi) His observation is, however, generally correct.

[7] Nie Gannu 1981: 141.

In literary history nowadays, the two terms—*huaben* and *ni huaben*—are generally loosely used for narrative texts of different periods: those of the Song and Yuan (from the twelfth to mid-fourteenth centuries AD) are called *huaben*, and those short stories (only short stories) of Ming and Qing are called *ni huaben*.[8]

How can we explain the confusion? If we carefully examine the narratological conventions of traditional Chinese fiction, we can see that the earliest *huaben* fiction of the Song dynasty was considered by some people as more likely to be prompt-books for oral performance, for no other reason than the fact that they are skeleton outlines containing very few oral narrative characteristics. Narratological conventions in later Chinese vernacular fiction became more reminiscent of those of oral performance. The contrast leads us to suspect that the "oral" characteristics (which I shall elaborate in the following chapters) became part of the writing practice because they served some other purposes, the most important of which was to install a stereotyped narrative frame. Any proposition concerning the influence of oral narrative on traditional Chinese fiction must, therefore, be carefully modified.[9]

Why, then, should traditional Chinese fiction adopt this set of narratological characteristics but not others? My suggested answer is that these seemingly "oral" conventions were the product of the four-century-long Rewriting period of Chinese vernacular fiction and of its low stratum in the generic hierarchy of Chinese culture. The lack of authorship made it difficult to fix the channel of the message which was necessary for the control of interpretation. When readership instead of authorship became the most important circumstantial context for interpretative guidance, the seemingly oral-narrative conventions were installed to facilitate communication, as the texts then were made most accessible to readers. In a word, it was not the authors of the vernacular fiction but the readers who decided the way of narration.

It was the practice of rewriting that gave rise to the extreme homogeneity of narratological features. This narratological "mock" orality of Chinese fiction is fundamentally different from the orality of storytelling performance, as it was the result of four centuries of rewriting, not of the oral narrating. Many nations have a much longer and more powerful oral-narrative tradition. Yet their fiction does not show some degrees of orality as Chinese vernacular fiction did.

Many scholars have discussed this simulation of oral-narrative performance as though it were a fairly faithful copy of the actual theatrical performance in the prehistory of Chinese fiction. Jaroslav Prusek, for instance, insists that the extraordinary

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[8]Suri Kaidi (1956: 4–5) argues, "In style the stories written by authors of the late Ming are hardly different from the *huaben* stories of the Song. But their motive for writing is different… That was why Lu Xun called it *ni huaben*." This theory of "motive" is most risky and seldom reliable in literary study. You Guo'en et al. 1979: 146–7 suggest a more complicated set of criteria which could cause more confusion: "Generally speaking those narrative texts that take Song and Yuan popular legends as their subject matter, and reflect the social life of the Song and Yuan times, with some linguistic details corresponding to the practices of the time such as social *mœurs*, taboo words, and official titles should be considered Song and Yuan *huaben*, even if they are rewritten by later writers.".

[9]Mistakes resulting from that misunderstanding arise frequently in textbooks and in scholarly papers. For instance quite a few scholars hold that the *Cihua* version of *Jin Ping Mei* was "notes for oral performance", with no other sound proof than the title.

longevity of this conventionalized narrative frame "shows the unusual strength of the creative genius of the Chinese professional story-tellers, who had impressed the form of their tales on Chinese fiction so effectively that it lived on without any basic changes for centuries."[10]

Prusek's affirmation is shared by many. Eugene Ouyang, for instance, maintains, "If the colloquial fiction fails to please the modern reader, the fault lies in the reader's failure to recreate imaginatively the actual experience of the original audience, for whom the narrative was intended",[11] because Chinese fiction responds to "the very different requirements of the actual and present audience".[12]

Because this view is common, let me state my different opinion here though I shall elaborate it in the following chapters in a more systematic way. It cannot be over-emphasized that this narrative frame in Chinese fiction is only a make-believe situation. Written narrative of every nation originates in oral narrative. It is not because the oral performers in those nations are not "creative genii" that the written narrative does not take over the oral-narrative frame. If it became a narrative convention that the narrator in Chinese vernacular fiction simulated an oral story-teller, there must be some other reason.

As for the cause of this simulation, let me repeat my hypothesis: this stereotyped narrative frame simulating oral performance was brought about by the four-centuries-long Rewriting period of vernacular fiction. During this period, fiction writers were unable to claim full authorship of their fictional works, which were both based on previous re-writings and subject to further rewriting. As there was no authoritative source of the narrative message, the narrator assumed a responsibility comparable to that in oral performance; thus, in this simulated oral narrative frame, the authorship could be left out of consideration, as in oral performance in which authorship is almost irrelevant.

By the end of the Rewriting period, around the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the set of narratological characteristics had already become a powerful convention that proved to be highly resistant to changes by individual initiative. That this convention withstood the challenge of some talented authors is mainly ascribable to the fact that the low cultural status of Chinese vernacular fiction remained. This does not mean that Chinese writers did not try to change the convention, nor does it mean that critics of those centuries did not try to argue for a higher cultural estimation of vernacular fiction. Critics like Li Zhi of the late Ming and Jin Shengtan of the early Qing contributed a great deal to the re-evaluation of Chinese vernacular fiction, and the eighteenth century witnessed in a few masterpieces the great climax of this fiction. The narratological homogeneity of Chinese vernacular fiction, however, is not necessarily a narratological rigidity. In this book, I shall demonstrate how adaptable vernacular fiction could be in the hands of its masters as if to prove that conventions can not stifle real genius. Despite these brilliant efforts, the narratological homogeneity of Chinese traditional fiction remained oppressively stable, and radical

[10] Prusek 1980: 106, 113.

[11] Plaks 1977: 59.

[12] Ibid. 57.

change in the cultural strata of Chinese fiction did not occur until after the late Qing period, when a narratological revolution finally took place.

II

Theoretically, oral narrative and written narrative should be strictly distinguished from each other. Oral narrative, being essentially a multimedia communication, completely incorporates into the narrative discourse the material presentations (the setting, the sound, the performing, etc.), making the discourse non-repeatable. Every performance works out a new version, no matter how faithful the performer is to the "original story". As counterweight to the *non-repeatability*, conventions become important as devices to stabilize reception and interpretation. The situation is very different from written narrative which is basically separable from its material presentations. A novel may come m a number of manuscript versions, or printed into a number of copies, or reprinted as different editions. As long as these versions remain semantically unchanged, they carry the same narrative text. We may say that the text of the written narrative is materially *repeatable* in nature as it is both re-printable and re-readable. Narratological conventions, therefore, are less important in comparison with oral narrative.

Early Chinese vernacular fiction enjoyed re-readability like any written text, but not re-printability, since almost every new edition was a rewriting. It was precisely this semi-repeatability that made narratological conventionality necessary.[13]

The text of the written narrative is not completely separable from its material form, because certain types of extra-textual material features enter into the composition of the narrative text. One of them is the printing conventions, like the division of chapters and paragraphs, punctuation, capitalization, and so on. These elements can sometimes play a very important role. The rise of May Fourth fiction, for instance, might not have been possible without the adoption of the division of paragraphs and punctuation marks. Some traditional writers in Shanghai (the Butterfly writers) even nicknamed their May Fourth opponents "New Punctuation Fiction" (*Xinshi Biaodian Xiaoshuo*).

Cyril Birch provides a penetrating insight into the relations between these seemingly unrelated formal characteristics:

> It may be worth investigating whether the import of paragraphing from the West did not impose a new discipline on writers… Where the traditional "paragraph" (unmarked) was often coterminous with the meandering sentence itself, we now have a carefully constructed unit with a single center of vision.[14]

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[13]To use semiotic terms, each performance of oral narration is a sinsign, but every other performance is bound to be a different qualisign and a different legisign. In written narrative, however, each copy is a sinsign, all copies of one edition belong to one qualisign, and all copies of all editions of one book, so long as there is no change in meaning, belong to the same legisign. Chinese vernacular fiction of the Rewriting period, then, lies somewhere in between the two: each copy is a sinsign; all copies of one edition belong to one qualisign; but copies of different editions belong to different legisigns as the text is bound to be significantly altered. For the definition of those terms, see Pharies 1985. His explanations are clearer than Peires' own.

[14]Goldman 1977: 393.

Those semi-text-bound features play a part in the written narration, and are different from text-free material features such as fonts, illustrations, binding, cover design, etc. which, when removed, effect no semantic change on the text itself.

When semi-text-bound features are changed, e.g. when, in modern editions, traditional Chinese fiction is given modern punctuation and sometimes cut into paragraphs, the changes in the narrative texts bring in corresponding, sometimes regrettable, semantic alteration.

III

The discussion on the supposed oral origin of Chinese fiction leads us further into the investigation of the different positions of the narrator in oral narration and in written narration.

In oral narration, the narrator is unmistakably the sender of the narrative message. He exists in flesh and blood and the receiver of the narrative message (the listener) is in positive contact with him. The author (if there is an author for the performed narrative) is only a supposition not indispensable for the narrative frame. The oral narrator is thus a complete realization of the subjectivity in the text.

The position of the narrator in factual narration (say, news report), whether oral or written is hardly different. In written fictional narrative, however, the narrator becomes abstract, reduced to what Roland Barthes called an *être en papier*.[15] In other words, the narrator is only a narratological function. It is the author who puts the narrative text down on paper, not the narrator, as the latter is now a special character, one of the author's creation. When writing the fictional work, the author not only creates the text but also the narrator's relations to the text. The shaping of the narrative text depends on the narrator's ability to perform the following functions: as the teller of the story—the narrative function; as the communicator with the receiver—the communicative function; as the director of the telling—the directing function; as commentator of the story-the commenting function; as more or less a character in the story—the function of characterization.

The list above is my tentative clarification of Gerard Genette's exposition.[16] Genette, however, does not point out that, in performing these functions, the abilities of the oral narrator are entirely different from those of the narrator in the written narrative. The oral narrator, being the tangible and positive source of the narrative

[15] Barthes 1977: 65.

[16] Gerard Genette (1980: 255–6) suggests that the narrator performs five functions: narrative function; directing function; forming the narrating situation; function of communication; testimonial function, or function of attestation. The definitions he offers are not always clear in each case. As I understand it, what he means by narrative function is the role of the teller of the story; directing function is the role of the commentator, providing "stage directions"; to form the narrating situation is to form the narrator-narratee relationship; function of communication is the role of the sender of the message; the last one, in Genette's words, is "the narrator's orientation toward himself", and is said to be the same as ideological function.

His discussion is rather chaotic. What, for instance, is the difference between the narrative function and the function of communication? Why is only the testimonial function concerned with ideology while the others are not?

message and the definite commander of the narration, can perform all the functions assigned to him in an audible or visible way.

The narrator in oral performance speaks, positively sending out the narrative message; he is in physical contact with the receivers of the message—the listeners—perceiving their response, and communicating with them on the spot; he is in actual control of the presentation of the narrative, and can add any explanation to his presentation; he stands aloof above the narrated world, and can impose his value-judgement or moral commentaries on the action and characters so that the listeners can understand the meaning of the story "correctly"; he can, temporarily suspending his narrator-ship, impersonate any character in the narrative by feigning the latter's gestures or voice.

In written narrative the narrator performs the five functions in a very different way. The only function he can perform naturally is personalization since he is a character, and he does not have to suspend his narrator-ship to become a character. His ability to perform other functions is conditional. Certainly he is not the sender of the message, as he himself is created by the narrative. Narratologically, however, the fictional narrative text is a story told by the narrator but, fictionally, overheard and recorded by the author in some way. No author can speak directly in the narrative as every word in it is supposed to be said by the narrator. Since the narrator himself is a special character, his words are not necessarily those of the author. What makes this distinction more significant is that these two personalities—the author and the narrator—are not necessarily in agreement in tone, in judgement, or in attitude towards the narrated world. That is why the generally accepted term "authorial intrusion" is, strictly speaking, unacceptable in narrative analysis, though positively "true". I prefer the term "narratorial intrusion", since we can hardly tell how much the author shares in these intrusions, but we can always safely say that they are made by the narrator.[17]

In oral narrative, as well as in non-fictional written narrative, the narrator, standing aloof from his narration, is a narrating narrator. In fictional written narrative, the narrative personality is the result of his narrating, that is to say, he is, paradoxically, a narrated narrator, who is begotten by the narrating action supposedly performed by himself.

The characterization of the narrator can be developed to various degrees, and the narrator's position in the narrated/narrating dualism can be varied, thus creating different modes of narrative presentation. Wayne Booth tried to distinguish two types of narrators: explicit and implicit. The two terms should be understood, as I see it, as explicitly narrated narrators and implicitly narrated narrators. The common terms "first-person narrator" (in lieu of the explicit narrator) and "third-person narrator" (in lieu of implicit narrator) are convenient but narratologically unsafe as any enunciator has to use the first-person when referring to himself. A "third-person" narrator is only a narrator who refrains from referring to himself at all in the narrative text. In

[17]In non-fictional narratives this problem generally does not exist. In journalism, for instance, the narrator of oral news reports is not very different from his counterpart in written news reports since in both cases the author and the narrator can be identical.

traditional Chinese fiction, to say that the narrative is in the first or in the third person is oversimplified. But for the convenience of discussion, I shall sometimes use these two terms, when there is no risk of misunderstanding.

Since it is almost impossible for the narrator to remain completely implicit, most of the implicit narrators are only implicit to a certain degree.[18] The idea of "the degree of implicitness" is especially relevant to traditional Chinese fiction, where the narrator, by convention, refers to himself as "the Story-Teller" (*Shuoshude or Shuohuade*) which is actually an implicit first-person self-reference. But he never allows himself to participate in the story he tells, so his narration is executed in the third person. Therefore this stereotyped narrator in Chinese vernacular fiction is a non-participant semi-explicit narrator.

In Chinese literary-language fiction the narrator often assumes the name identical with the author. At the end of the well-known *Tang chuanqi* (i.e. literary-language) story Bai Xingjian's "The Story of Li Wa" (Li Wa Zhuan): "I take up my writing brush and write the story down. This is the autumnal eighth month of the year Yihai. I am Bai Xingjian of Taiyuan." (TRXX, 36).

The narrator's self-identification with the author is so persistent in Chinese literary-language fiction that literary historians can verify the authorship by finding the narrator's fictional name in the story. There is a profound cultural motivation behind this which I shall elaborate in the last part of the current study.

This formulaic self-introduction, however, never appears in Chinese vernacular fiction (with the possible exception of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*). The reason seems to be obvious: the position of vernacular fiction was too low in the generic hierarchy of Chinese culture for any author to feel honored by the authorship. But this is not the reason if we look into the matter more closely. Not until the late Qing did the author begin to let the narrator even borrow his improvised pen-name which could not in the least harm the author's reputation. The main reason was that the narrator's position is generically reserved for that impersonal, non-participant semi-implicit story-teller, who refuses to have a name, and survives by staying nameless and faceless.[19]

IV

The communicative function—one of the narrator's five functions—is to keep the narratee in contact, because any message, by definition, should have a receiver.

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[18]This degree of implicitness is inversely related to his personalization. That is to say, the more explicit the narrator, the more distinct his voice in the narrative. If the narrator is almost completely implicit (in the so-called "fly-on-the-wall" technique in modern fiction), his voice seems to come from a void.

[19]Cyril Birch, in private communication with me, suggests, "Must there not be some connection with the fact that only China at this time had cheap woodblock printing, widely used for publications for the semi-educated (farmers' almanacs etc.)—so that only in China would the commercial gain from novel-publishing be so great?" This is very possibly the reason for the continuous flow of bookstore recensions.

The narratee has to perform some functions in correspondence with the functions of the narrator.[20] Without the narratee's co-operation as the communicative partner, it is impossible for the narrator to perform his functions. In other words, to form the narrative frame requires the collaboration of the two.[21]

Depending on the degree of characterization, the narratee can also be either explicit or implicit. Just as the narrator in traditional Chinese fiction is a fixed character of the Story-Teller, the narratee is the Respected Listener (*Kanguan*) who, as a stereotyped collective personality, is semi-explicit. The conventional narrative frame requires that he plays the role of the listener supposedly sitting in front of the performer in the theater.

Quite often in Chinese vernacular fiction the narrator imitates what the narratee might say. In the well-known late-Ming short story "The Oil Pedlar Takes the Top Courtesan" (Maiyou Lang Du Zhan Huakui Nu) there is an example:

> The boy Zhu then changed his name back to Qin. *Story-teller, if a person of higher social stratum wants to change back to his original name, he could write a memorandum to be approved by the court, or notify such institutions as the Ministry of Rites, the Imperial Academy or the State Registry. Who knows that an oil pedlar changes his name?* Well then, he had a way: he wrote on one of the two oil buckets the big character Qin, and on the other the city Bianliang. The oil buckets then became his posters that everybody could see and understand. (XSHY, 105)

The lines italicized in the above quote are the narrator's simulation of what could be a question raised by the listeners during an oral performance. This is the way that the narratee helps in establishing the narrative frame. The position of the narratee in traditional Chinese fiction is even more generically determined than that of the narrator, as the audience in oral performance (which the narratee assumes himself to be) is even less likely to be personalized. He renders great help in stabilizing and perpetuating the conventional narrative frame in traditional Chinese fiction.[22]

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[20] Corresponding to narrator's narrative function, he plays the role of the listener; corresponding to narrator's communicative function, he plays the role of the receiver of the narrative message; corresponding to narrator's direction function, he plays the role of one who needs the narrator's directions in order to comprehend the narrative technique; corresponding to narrator's commentary function, he plays the role of one who needs the narrator to tell him how to understand the story; he is more or less "characterized", i.e. he becomes a character in this or that manner in the fiction.

[21] Siegfried Schmidt in *Text-theorie*, when defining what he calls CAG (Communicative Action Game), argues, "one of its principal features is that it takes the form of role complementary speech by the communicative partners… [that] consists of at least one speech act and one further linguistic act" (Quoted in Watts 1981: 31).

[22] Patrick Hanan, in his article "The Nature of Ling Meng-ch'u's Fiction" (Plaks 1977:), analyzes the narrative frame in Chinese vernacular fiction, which he calls "simulated context": "'Simulated context' means the context of a situation in which a piece of fiction claims to be transmitted. In Chinese vernacular fiction, of course, the simulacrum is that of oral story-teller addressing his audience, a pretence in which the author and reader happily acquiesce in order that the fiction can be communicated." This, I venture to say, is disputable: the narrative frame, of whatever kind, is not to connect the author and the reader, as none of them directly participates in the narrating instance. What this frame connects is the narrator and the narratee. It is the narrator who assumes the simulacrum of the oral story-teller in Chinese vernacular fiction, not the author, and the narratee poses as the audience, not the reader.

At the beginning of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* the narrator identifies himself as Cao Xueqin, the author's name. In the following passage the narrator goes further to call himself "your faithful servant" (*nupu*) which is a new form of first-person self-reference, so the narrator seems to be breaking away from the narratological conventions.

Respected Listeners, you may ask from where this book starts. It may sound strange but it is interesting upon examination. Please let your faithful servant start from the very beginning so that you Respected Listener will not be confused. (HLM, 1)

The narratee, however, remains the conventional "Respected Listener" (*Kanguan*), thus forcing the narrator to return to the stereotyped Story-Teller, and to put aside the personality he has just taken upon himself.

The discussion gives rise to another narratological problem: the same story can be presented with different narrative texts. This happens beyond question in oral performance where each presentation, by definition, is unique. In written narratives, however, the repeatability of the narrative text obscures the fact that any narrative work can be considered as one of innumerable possible presentations of the story.[23]

Narratologists differ in the names they give to the two elements of the dichotomy.[24] The pair of terms "story/discourse" suggested by Chatman, though generally acceptable, sound inappropriate in this book, since the two terms shall frequently be used

[23]This reminds us of the structuralist *langue-parole* dichotomy. This idea is useful to any serious student of narratology no matter whether he is a structuralist or not. The definition of narration offered by Lotman and Uspensky, for instance, may sound strange: "Narration is transposition, transposition of the various elements inside." (Lucid 1977: 237).

[24]The following is a list of the terms used by narratologists denoting the pair of concepts which I call the narrated/the pre-narrated:

Rimmon-Kenan	story	text
Chatman	story	discourse
Russian Formalists	*fabula*	suzhet
Ricardou	*fiction*	narration
Genette	*histoire*	*récit*
Barthes	*récit*	*discours*
Todorov	*histoire*	*discours*

The dichotomy, however, is not beyond challenge. There are some theoretical as well as practical difficulties: how much "transposition" can a pre-narrated story allow the narrated texts to have while still claiming the narrated text as its derivative? How drastic can the narrator's mediation be if the narrated text is to remain one of the narrated texts of the same pre-narrated story? Some critics argue that this dichotomy is groundless since every narrated text is irreducibly unique, and cannot share a common pre-narrated story with other texts. In my discussion, however, I retain this hypothetical dichotomy because, I think, any narrated text is only potentially based on a pre-narrated story, which does not exist a priori but, together with the narrated text, is a product of the narrating instance. Whether it can share a common pre-narrated story with other narrative texts is, then, of secondary importance.

in their ordinary meanings in the current study. The pair of terms *histoire/recit* suggested by Gerard Genette are somehow frowned at by many English readers. Besides, they are not accepted even by French narratologists. I suggest the pair of terms "pre-narrated story/narrated text", for the simple reason that they cause less ambiguity.

The pre-narrated story can be considered as a continuous flow of events in its unfiltered temporal and spatial state. The amount of detail it contains is beyond observation. Since it is not yet presented in words, it has no narrator, though it is also dependent on the narrating instance in the sense that without its narrated versions it cannot claim to exist at all.

It is impossible for any part of the narrated text to exist without narratorial mediation which is, by definition, omnipresent in narration.[25]

V

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the narratological conventionality of Chinese vernacular fiction finally entered a crisis, when the narrator's position in the conventional narrative frame became problematic.

In the majority of late Qing fiction works, however, the traditional narrative frame fails to take on any substantial change. The earliest restlessness of a narratological transformation can only be found in a very small number of the best of late Qing novels. Nevertheless, we cannot fail to notice, in almost all the novels of that period, a number of modifications, the most apparent of which is the change of the self-reference of the narrator from *Shuoshude* (the story-teller) to *Zuoshude* (the story-writer). This shift could mean the subversion of the conventional narrative frame. Yet the late Qing narrator does not seem to realize the fundamental difference this self-reference could make. The way he asserts his controlling authority remains the same.

In The *Bureaucrats* for instance, the narrator insists on being the moral judge of the events told, or the commander of the narrating action, in the same way as the old story-teller narrator:

> You all have to know that these philanthropists… at least saved a great number of people. This is the unbiased opinion of the Story-Writer. If nothing good is said about those people, it would not be in keeping with the Confucian Credo of Forbearance. (GCXXJ, 507)

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[25] Chatman argues that in some parts of fiction the narratorial mediation is absent: "Those that pretend to be constituted by found letters and diaries least presuppose a narrator. If we insist on an agent beyond the implied author, he can only be a mere collector or collator…The sole purported change is from handwriting to print." (Chatman 1978: 67). This is an interesting observation though it is again debatable.

Let us briefly examine the situation in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* as an example. In that novel the narrative is supposed to have been written by the Stone on itself. The Taoist Kongkong then copied down the text and passed it to a person named "Cao Xueqin" who, "after ten years of hard work", renders it in its present form. Now here we have three characters, all having a hand in the narrating. Even if we call the Taoist Kongkong a mere collector and "Cao Xueqin" a mere collator, the Stone is obviously the teller. This is an example of the triple-composite narrator.

> The event, so alarming at the beginning, faded into nothing. This is the regular practice with Chinese officialdom. It is not the Story-Writer coming in like a lion but going out like a lamb. (GCXXJ, 489)

The change of self-reference seems to strengthen, not weaken the narrator's controlling authority, as he remains the non-participant semi-implicit narrator.

In a couple of late Qing novels, the narrator goes so far as to change his self-reference to the first-person "I". Wu Jianren's *Nine Murders* starts: "This story took place in Guangdong. *I've heard* that people of all provinces say that Guangdong abounds in burglars. This is true." (JMQY, 1)

However, any hope this change of self-reference raises that the conventional narrative frame may now be removed proves false. For this narrator is still non-participant, and soon shifts back to the more conventional *Zuoshude*. More importantly, the narrator still adheres to his aloof controlling position, never allowing himself to be characterized into the narrative.

I suspect that this self-reference "I" is borrowed from Western fiction as it had almost never occurred in vernacular fiction before the late Qing. One of the most widely read novels at that time was Lin Shu's translation of *Ivanhoe*. After a brief description of the landscape, the novel starts with a first-person reference: "Such being *our* chief scene, the date of *our* story refers to a period toward the end of the reign of Richard I, when…"[26] In Lin Shu's translation, the self-reference is faithfully retained. Scott's beginning may have given late Qing authors some idea of how the impersonal, non-participant narrator could turn explicit in a localized way, without a radical change in the narrative frame.

What makes the traditional narrative frame safer is that the conventional appellation of the narratee remained the same *Kanguan*, but the meaning could be said to have altered now because of the ambiguity of the Chinese character *kan* (to watch or to read)—*Kanguan*, originally meaning the audience for a theatrical performance, now means "readers", corresponding to the change of the appellation of the narrator. In *Strange Events*: "When we tried to read the note, Jizhi and I almost split our sides with laughter. You know what was written there? Please let me write down the original so that you can all *have a look*. The text runs like this…" (ESNMDZGXZ, Chap. 86, 797). Beside a tricky mixture of the narrated now with the narrating now and the reading now, the reading action of the narratee is spotlighted, an action that the old narratee (*Kanguan* as listener) is unable to achieve.

The ambiguity of the appellation *Kanguan* was convenient for the continuity of the conventions. Often the new narrator-narratee (story-writer vs. reader) communicative pair slipped back into the old pair of story-teller versus listener. In Chap. 12 of *A Flower in the Sinful Sea* there is a passage about a letter which the hero Wenqing writes from Germany to his friend in Beijing: "There was a postscript recounting how the photo was taken, which was another unprecedented interesting anecdote. You will ask who was in this photo. Please all of you be patient, and let me *tell* [shuo] you in detail. Now it was…" (NHH,120).

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[26] Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe.* London: Nelson, 1920, 1. Italics mine.

In Wu Jianren's *Strange Events*, one of the novels where the narrator calls himself "I" from beginning to end and turns himself into a character (in this case, a merchant), the narrative can still slip back into the story-teller versus listener frame:

> "This man was none other than a remote uncle of mine whose name was Wang Xianren, alternative name Boshu. Now here I have to tell you about the history of this uncle of mine. Respected Listeners [Kanguanmen], *please lend me your ear*!This Wang Boshu was originally a…" (ESNMDZGXZ, Chap. 21, 177).
>
> Late Qing fiction abounds in examples like this. It is by no means only sloppy writing.

In the chapter ending-beginning formula, the dilemma faced by the new narratorial personality is revealed in a more telling way. The end of Chap. 1 of *Strange Events* runs as follows:

> Hearing such words, I was stunned. I had no choice but to find an inn to wait for my uncle to return. Because of this waiting, some incidents were bound to happen:
>
> The family members were to split up though they were of the same flesh and blood;
>
> The poor man in a straw hat was to meet his prosperous friend at the end of the world.
>
> If you want to know what happened after this, please wait for what will be written in the next chapter [qiedai xiahui zai ji]. (ESNMDZGXZ, Chap. 1, 24)

The chapter ending-beginning remained exactly the same, with only one word changed in the traditional formulaic phrase "wait for what will be told in the next chapter". Such was the timid modification of the narrator's personality in late Qing fiction.

Despite this, the emergence of a real explicit and participant narrator in some vernacular novels, notably Wu Jianren's Strange Events and Wang Yunqing's *Viewed with Cold Eyes*, is still an event of great importance for the development of Chinese fiction. First-person narrative is not a tradition of Chinese fiction either in the vernacular or in the literary language. There are some rare cases of first-person narration, but these had virtually no influence on later fiction. The narrative ballad "Mulan Ci" (from the fourth to the fifth centuries $_{AD}$) is in the first person, but its suspected "nomadic" source might be the reason why it is unique in the history of Chinese poetry. The early Tang *chuanqi* tale, Zhang Zu's "A Visit to the Immortals' Cave" (You Xianku, c.680 $_{AD}$), was perhaps the only first-person narrative in Chinese fiction before the late Qing, but the tale was lost for many centuries prior to its rediscovery in Japan in the 1920s, thus precluding the possibility of its influencing later writers, though it was influential in Japanese literature. A much more influential narrative, *Six Chapters of My Floating Life* (*Fusheng Liuji*), is not fiction but memoir, and was not widely circulated until it was reprinted in the magazine *Amaranth* (*Yanlaihong*) in 1906. We have no proof that Wu Jianren had any access to this memoir when he started *Strange Events* in 1904.

If there are only a couple of vernacular novels with explicit participant narrators, first-person narrative is much more common in the literary-language fiction by the Butterfly writers. Su Manshu's romantic autobiographical novel *Fragmented Letters* (*Duanhong Lingyan Ji*, 1912) is a beautiful romantic narrative with the protagonist as the narrator. Xu Zhenya's *My Wife* (*Yu Zhi Qi*, 1916) adroitly shifted back and forth

between the third-person narrative and the first-person narrative. After epistolary fiction or diary fiction enters into literary-language fiction in such works as Xu Zhenya's *Tearful History of The Deserted* (*Xuehong Leishi*), the use of first-person narrative increased rapidly. Lu Xun's apprentice piece, his only literary-language short story, "Nostalgia for the Past" (Huaijiu, 1913) was also in the first person. I think the first-person introduction in La Dame aux camélias and the explicit narration in *Sherlock Holmes* must have provided at least some hints to Chinese fiction writers.

In the early twentieth century these works were translated into literary language. However, this was not the only reason why it was fiction in the literary language (which was notoriously inflexible) rather than fiction in the vernacular that showed such remarkable adaptability. There had not been such a rigidly conventionalized narrative frame in literary-language fiction as in the vernacular. By the late Qing period, the cultural gap between the two was still much deeper than most scholars perceive. This is an issue that I shall return to in the last part of this book.

In the very first late Qing political novel—Liang Qichao's *The Future of New China*—we already find the narrator's personality becoming quite complicated. The main body of the novel is supposed to be the speech given by Dr Kong in the year 2016 AD (or 2513 after Confucius's birth), at a meeting to celebrate the success of political reform in China. Kong's speech is said to be recorded in shorthand by the secretaries of the History Society, and cabled word by word to the magazine *New Fiction* in Yokohama to be printed. So the narrator appears in the first person on both narrative levels. But none of them is a participant narrator. That is to say, they are not characters in the event they narrate at all. The remarkable change is that neither of the two narrators calls himself "story-writer", as they are made characters in the narrative.

The first-person narrator in *Strange Events*, however, is half-participant. Though he still has to perform the routine function which late Qing fiction regularly assigned to the narrator—to string together the many anecdotes and stories—the parts about "myself" form quite a coherent story and carry more thematic weight than the stories told by various characters in the novel. The beginning chapters recount the attempt by the narrator's uncle to grab the property of a helpless widow and the narrator when he was an inexperienced youth. The narrator's gradual accumulation of worldly experience and his adoption of a contemptuous and cynical attitude towards all the wickedness in the world become the theme running through the whole novel.

Jaroslav Prusek does not have a high opinion of this novel:

> It is evident, however, in this case, that the transformation of the traditional narrator into a clearly defined speaker using the first person singular and presenting all the episodes as his own experience, lived through or heard, was not a functional change… We soon realize, nevertheless, that this is only a pose and that the author had no other aim in mind than to put together a collection of stories and anecdotes to captivate and entertain his readers.[27]

Actually, if we piece together all the passages recounting the personal experience of the narrator, we would have a structurally coherent and beautifully written novel. The whole novel now can be considered to be the blending of two entirely different

[27] Prusek 1980: 115.

novels. Prusek's accusation is applicable only to half of it. The narratorial position in the other half can be said to be a significant break in the evolution of traditional Chinese fiction.

The dilemma caused by the double role of the narrator—telling his own story and telling the stories he has heard or seen—is more disastrous in *Viewed with Cold Eyes*. The narrator has his own story to narrate—his ruined relationship with his bride, who was uneducated and pitiably greedy, and his resuscitated romance with the prostitute Sulan. Yet in order to supply as many anecdotes as possible, his passionate lover Sulan has to engage in constantly telling stories at the expense of her own image—she now appears as an extremely gossipy woman.

The narratee in some late Qing novels also acquires a certain explicitness. In Chap. 14 of *Viewed with Cold Eyes*, when the treachery of Shanghai prostitutes is discussed, the narratee is called in: "Those gentlemen who have some experience in the Shanghai whoring circle must know what I am talking about, and I do not have to say too much about it." (LYG, 122). Though it sounds more natural for an explicit narrator to call the narratee into explicitness, we can find instances when the implicit narrator in late Qing fiction can also play the game. In *The Nine-Tail Tortoise* (*Jiuwei Gui*), after a long explanatory commentary about how irresistibly *seductive* the celebrated courtesan Lin Daiyu was, the narrator calls upon the narratee as his whoring companion: "Those of you Respected Readers who are veterans of the whoring circles, and know Lin Daiyu personally, must know that my statement is not groundless." (JWG, 196). From these two examples we can see that the way to make the narratee explicit is the same in the two novels with different narrators. This shows that the explicitness of the narrator in late Qing fiction could be very superficial.

Nevertheless, encouraged by this opportunity of comparing notes, sometimes the narrator can unwittingly acquire a little characterization, as can be seen in another example from *The Nine-Tail Tortoise*:

> Just have a look at how fierce Jin Yuege was! Just think how heartless, how vicious, how totally lacking in conscience these courtesans are, and you understand why it is very ill-advised to marry a courtesan. This advice is derived from *my own* experience, and not loose talk. (JWG, 64. Italics mine.)

That is perhaps the uttermost characterization the traditional nonparticipant semi-implicit narrator would allow himself, without damaging the narrative frame.

Thus, the narrator-narratee pair in late Qing fiction remains generally unchanged in late Qing fiction. The modifications some novels managed to work up were not sufficient to bring Chinese fiction out of its traditional mode.

VI

A discussion of the narratological characteristics of May Fourth fiction may seem somewhat superfluous as its formal features are not far from the "normal" modern fiction with which we are familiar. Such an effort is worthwhile only when the discussion is placed against the historical context when compared with traditional Chinese fiction, especially its last phase late Qing fiction, and with post-May Fourth

fiction. Because of this, my summary of the narratological characteristics of May Fourth fiction will be more comparative than descriptive.

The conventional narrative frame of traditional Chinese vernacular fiction is completely dismissed in May Fourth Fiction. This dismissal determines all other changes. As Cyril Birch points out: "The most startling new feature of the fiction published just after the literary revolution of 1917–1919 was not its Westernized syntax nor its tone of gloom but the emergence of a new authorial persona."[28]

The conventional semi-implicit non-participant story-teller narrator, or the slightly modified late Qing story-writer narrator, disappear, to be replaced by specifically characterized narrators. Every piece of fiction has to design its own unique narrative frame to present the narrator. He can now be a character whose narration is personalized, or almost totally effaced so that his narrative sounds "objective". Some general tendencies can still be noticed.

First-person narration becomes the most common form of narratorial characterization in May Fourth fiction. Of Lu Xun's twenty-six stories written during these ten years, twelve, almost half, are in first-person narration. Since most May Fourth writers are more subjectively inclined than Lu Xun, the percentage of first-person narration could hardly be less than that. In Guo Moruo's stories and short novels, first-person narration amounts to 70%; in Yu Dafu's works, 50%. The percentage of first-person narrative is lowest with Ye Shengtao, in whose stories the number of first-person narratives dwindles from about 40% in the first collection *Estrangement* (*Gemo*, 1922), to 20% in the second collection *Fire* (*Huozai*, 1923), to 9% in the third collection *Under the Fire* (*Xianxia*, 1925), to zero per cent in the fourth collection *In the Town* (*Chengzhong*, 1926). Ye's writing, however, has all along been considered more "objective" than his contemporaries.

The percentage of first-person narratives is also low in Zhang Ziping's works. Since his writing is the closest to the narrative mode of traditional fiction, there is nothing surprising in this.

Among the first-person narratives, epistolary or diary narrative frames are common, especially epistolary. For example, Feng Yuanjun's "Traces of Spring" (Chunhen) comprises forty love-letters with more emphasis on the state of mind of the narrator-protagonist herself than on the events the story describes. Xiang Liangpei's "Six Letters" (Liu Feng Shu) is in much the same vein as Lu Xun's "Hometown" (Guxiang) but is written in the form of letters to a friend, and the narrator-protagonist's disappointment with his return is more intimately conveyed.

May Fourth writers considered the epistolary-diary form advantageous for establishing the genuineness of the sentiment. Yu Dafu declares in an essay "Diary Literature" (Riji Wenxue): "Though kept outside orthodox literature, diary is the central genre of literature… In comparison with other forms of first-person narratives, diary literature is more firmly grounded and more reliable to establish genuineness."[29] What Yu Dafu means by this exaggeration (the central genre) is that the diary form

[28] Goldman 1977: 390.

[29] Yu Dafu, 1927: 78.

is more self-centered and subjective, thus making the characterization of the narrator more convincing.

Though they were favorite forms for essays, the culturally much higher genre, the diary and epistolary form had never been used in Chinese vernacular literature. The conventional narrative frame precludes their usage. It is true that the epistolary form had been a stock technique in Butterfly fiction which was written in the literary language. Many novels produced by this Butterfly group read like "anthologies of model love-letters" (*qingshu chidu*), and, indeed, they sold well on the market as such.

The risk of the diary-epistolary form, or of first-person narrative in general, is that the narrator tends to be characterized into the personality of the author, giving the fictional works an autobiographical slant. Many of the May Fourth writers enjoyed this opportunity for self-identification, although in May Fourth fiction there are also quite a number of successful works of non-autobiographical characterization of the explicit narrator. For instance, the first-person narrator is personalized into a woman in Zhu Ziqing's story "The History of Laughter" (Xiao De Lishi), and into a cowardly philanderer in Li Jinming's "In a Boat" (Zhou Zhong).

There are also a few stories of the May Fourth period where the narrative changes hands from one narrator to another—usually with first-person narration shifting to third-person implicit narration. In Pan Xun's story "Notes about the Mind" (Xinye Zaji) the first-person narrator gives way to a third-person narrator, turning himself into a non-narrator character, and then takes back the narratorial voice. In Li Jinming's "In a Boat", the whole story is in first-person narration, but when the story finishes as the narrator-protagonist flees from the woman with whom he had an affair on board the steamer, a paragraph in the third person is added, so that the new narrator can describe the sulkiness of this ex-narrator (now a mere character) and censure his "irresponsible" action. This change of the narrator might be a reversion to the traditional interpretative control.

Wheres in a few late Qing novels the conventionalized narratee holds back the transformation of the narrative frame, in many May Fourth works of fiction the characterization of the narratee contributes to the individualization of the narrative frame. Feng Yuanjun's "Secret Mourning" (Qiandao) is the narrator-protagonist's direct address to his deceased sister-in-law. In Yu Dafu's "Niaoluo Xing", the narratee—the narrator's wife who does not appear in the story—was repeatedly called up, as the confessionalist narrator—protagonist addresses her in repentance. Both the explicitness of the narratee—in this case the narrator's wife—and the direct appellation of the narratee as "you" effectively reinforce the explicitness of the narrator.

More frequent is the practice of characterizing the narratee as the narrator's most intimate friend to whom the narrator-protagonist can confide himself. In Guo Moruo's erotic story "Donna Karmelo" (Kemeiluo Guniang), the narrator-protagonist sighs at the beginning of his confession:

> In fact I do not have any one whom I can claim to be my genuine friend: if I expose my mind nakedly, I am afraid all my friends will spit in my face in contempt, and I am afraid you will be one of them too. This letter of mine will bring you the sorrow of disappointment. I feel sad about that. But I feel sadder about the fact that we have all along been kissing each other

while wearing masks. After much hesitation, I have made up my mind to write to you. (T, 110)

With the narrator-narratee communicative pair thus sufficiently characterized, the narrator in Chinese fiction emerges from his long centuries of impersonality. The narrator thus individually set up does not claim the authority that could control the interpretation. The discursive order that was typical of traditional Chinese fiction is now replaced by a discursive uncertainty.

At the other extreme, the narrator in third-person narratives is more implicit in May Fourth fiction than in traditional Chinese fiction—so implicit that not a trace of narratorial control can be found, and discursive uncertainty is now the result of the apparent lack of any narrative guidance to the interpretation. In Lu Xun's story "Medicine" (Yao) and "A Public Example" (Shizhong), the narrator stays completely hidden. "A Humiliating Demonstration" can be regarded as a fine example of the "fly-on-the-wall" narrative so highly praised by modern critics. The narrative here becomes "behaviorist" from beginning to end as the narrator poses as a mere recorder. "Objective recording" itself is paradoxical. Narrating destroys the independent existence of the narrated world. Yet the narrator's abstention from interpretative control, even if only a gesture, allows the narrative text a broad field of freedom of meaning.

There are, however, some works in May Fourth fiction where the narrator is semi-implicit, that is, implicit but often intruding into the narrative. In Ye Shengtao's best story "Mr Pan Amid Hardships" (Pan Xiansheng zai Nanzhong) the narrator exposes himself in a limited way: "The easy manners of the arriving passengers, the anxiety of the waiting passengers, and the small profiteering of the porters—these are not what *we* are going to talk about, as *we* are only going to tell the story about a certain Mr Pan from the town of Rangli." (XX, 39) The "we" in this passage is a more convenient way for the narrator to come out of complete implicitness together with his narratee, and is much less intrusive than the traditional semi-implicit narratorial pair.

In Shen Congwen's story "Chen" (Morning), the narrator began the story by providing another way of calling up the semi-implicit narratee: "Everybody knows that this early spring morning was just one of those mornings that sends the love of young couples into full bloom. Anyone who has a satisfactory wife, with her hair newly bobbed, would surely know what Mr Lan would do to his wife. I do not have to say more." (YZ, 63.) This reminds us of the late Qing narrator comparing notes with his whoring companion. Yet in late Qing fiction this evocation of the narratee is in earnest. The narrator needs the help of the narratee to prove his power over meaning control, i.e. the power to control the interpretation of meaning. In May Fourth fiction, however, the evocation of the narratee is mostly satirical in tone. The expected testimony of the narratee does not confirm the intended interpretation, but, on the contrary, helps to vary the meaning.

To facilitate the satire, the narrator has to enlarge the distance between the narrative frame and the narrated world so that he could acquire the power to subject the narrated world to examination. But that is very different from the satire of late Qing fiction, as the narrator's power is not used to exaggerate but to overstate, and the result is not the

reaffirmation of the narrator's control of interpretation but indicates his abstinence from it.

Lu Xun's short novel *The True Story of A Q* (*A Q Zhengzhuan*) is the most fortuitous example. Lu Xun's technique is to over-play the game, to let the garrulously intrusive narrator flaunt his privilege to excess so that his manœuvring of the narration itself becomes the target of the satire. At the very beginning of this short novel the narrator, in a series of long intrusions, questions and deliberates on his position and his manner of narrating, to the extent that he not only harbors doubts about his own ability to tell about narrated world but suspects the futility of doing so.[30]

> The only thing that I can comfort myself with is that the syllable A in the name A Q is very exact. There was no groundless supposition that needs to be corrected by more learned men. As for the rest, I can be certain of nothing. My only hope is that one day the disciples of Dr Hu Shi who "has an obsession with history and textual research" will find new clues. By that time, however, my True Story of A Q will have already vanished. (Lu Hsun 1956: i. 96)

So even in the rare cases in May Fourth fiction where the narrator remains semi-implicit, his manipulation is exaggerated to expose his vulnerability. Thus May Fourth fiction completely destroys the conventional narratorial frame by removing the narrator from the position of controlling meaning.

VII

A narrator has to be concerned with many things other than his job of narrating the story. He can suspend his narration and talk instead about his narrating, or make his own comments on the characters and events in the story. "Asides" of this kind are natural in oral performance, where the narrator takes care that his listeners will respond properly to his story and understand his intention in telling it. Since the listeners' response is physically perceivable, his intrusions can always be justified by the particular situation.

In written narrative, however, this exchange of messages becomes shadow-boxing, as neither the narrator nor the narratee are physically substantial, and the fictional narrative frame does not justify the narrator's departure from the narrating.

In oral narration, the intentional context can be established by a number of extra-linguistic and para-linguistic means: tone, gesture, facial expression, etc. In written

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[30] In Gogol's story "The Nose" we find that the narrator appears at the beginning of the story pondering at great length over how to name the protagonist and how to start the narrative. When the story is about to finish, he appears again trying to laugh away his own narrative:

> Only now, on thinking it all over, we perceive that there is a great deal that is improbable in it. Apart from the fact that it is certainly strange for a nose supernaturally to leave its place and to appear in various places in the guise of a civil councillor—how was it that Kovaliov did not grasp that he could advertise about his nose in a newspaper office? I do not mean to say that I should not think it too expensive to advertise: that is nonsense, and I am by no means a mercenary person: but it is improper, awkward, not nice! (*The Collected Tales and Plays of Nikolai Gogol*, New York: Octagon Books, 1978, i. 89)

Though literary historians are sure that there existed a fruitful intimacy between the two fiction works, the narrator's over-playing of self-doubt is much more limited in Gogol's story than that in Lu Xun's.

narrative, the narrator is left with no other means than words, with a little help from para-linguistic devices such as exclamation marks.

The narrator has choice of two detours, by means of which he can express his own opinions: self-characterization and narratorial intrusions. Since in traditional Chinese fiction, the narrator by necessity remains the non-participant semi-implicit story-teller, and self-characterization is out of the question, the only way for self-expression is to intrude into the narrative.

Narrative intrusions can be divided into two types: directions which explain how the story is being told, and commentaries which supply information or explain an attitude to the narrated events.[31]

Most of the abundant directions in traditional Chinese novels are powerfully style-indicative. That is to say, they mark out the narratological characteristics instead of explaining the narrator's way of narrating, When the narrator in written narrative ends a chapter, he does not have to say, "Please listen to the next chapter if you want to know what happens afterwards", because the text obviously goes on. The direction is used here as a reminder of the conventional narrative frame.

Only a small number of directions are actually used for smoothing out technical difficulties. In *The Dream of the Red Chamber*:

> The Rongs' Mansion had altogether more than three hundred persons from the top to the lowest servants. Every day there happened more than a dozen events at least, entangled like hemp fibers, with no event so distinct that it can be used as a starting-point for our narration. I am puzzled as to what event and what character I can use to start the narrative. One day, unexpectedly, someone from a tiny little household hundreds of miles away was coming to the Rongs' Mansion. It is not a bad idea to start with this family. (HLM, 68)

This long-winded direction is justifiable because the way the story starts is unconventional for classical Chinese novels. *The Dream of the Red Chamber* does not mean to impress the readers with its boldness in narratological innovation. A direction explaining the necessity of the new device could alleviate the possible discomfort.

Commentaries can also be used for a series of purposes other than providing the narrator's opinions about the story. Like directions, commentaries which are all but natural in oral performance may reveal the awkwardness of the narrator's position in written narrative. In this example in the Cihua version of *Jin Ping Mei*:

> Old Lady Wang said, "My Master, listen to me. Hanky-panky is by no means an easy thing to do. *Now what is hanky-panky? It's just what we call adultery today.* You have to be capable of five things before you can hope to be successful…" (JPM Cihua, Chap. 3. Italics mine.)

The passage inserted in a passage of reported speech is commentary not said by Old Lady Wang but by the narrator. *Jin Ping Mei's* story is developed from part of the twelfth-century novel *Water Margin*, and this "teaching of Old Lady Wang"

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[31] Sometimes, directions can hardly be distinguished from commentaries. In Chap. 103 of *Water Margin*: "Wang Qing, seeing Lady Peng come out, rushed forward to fight. *You may say that such a strange thing is not believable even if I tell you*: suddenly Wang Qing saw a dozen servants running out, weapons in hand and shouting." (SHZ, 986) What Wang Qing sees is a hallucination. The narrator's remark is now both a commentary on the story and a direction calling for attention. This is a combined intrusion.

could also be found in many editions of *Water Margin* but none of them has this inserted explanation, as *Water Margin* is "then" and *Jin Ping Mei* is "now". In oral performance, such an insertion is easy, as all the narrator has to do is to switch his tone from that of imitating the character to his tone in narrating. In written narrative, such an insertion sounds awkward. The Chongzhen version of *Jin Ping Mei* deleted the inserted explanation.

What supplementary commentaries supply is not simply background knowledge for understanding a certain event. Sometimes they also supply information about the character's past or future. This is especially common in traditional Chinese fiction in which large-scale flashbacks or flash-forwards are rare. In *The Three Kingdoms* and *Water Margin*, most of the characters, upon their first appearance in the narrative, are introduced with a supplementary commentary recounting their past. And most characters are given a supplementary commentary on their future when they leave the story, if the narrative is not going to follow the life of those characters to the end.

Another kind of commentary brings strange characters or events necessary to the social norms, so that the stories are less shocking to the reading public's sense of moderation. In *Jin Ping Mei*, Song Huilian, a servant's wife who had once committed fornication with Ximen Qing, takes her life when she finds it too distasteful:

> [The women in the house] were unable to force the door open, and were all panic-stricken. Finally they let a boy servant climb through the window. An *earthen pot can hardly avoid the fate of breaking at the well*. They cut the rope and gave her first-aid but all to no avail. She died soon after. (JPM Cihua, Chap. 18)

Such commonplace explanations are abundant in traditional Chinese fiction, though in the best of Chinese fiction, explanations of the *Jin Ping Mei Cihua* kind are reduced to the minimum. In Chap. 27 of *Jin Ping Mei*, there is a three-page-long commentary on the unbearable heat of that summer, which states that there are six kinds of lucky people (princes, monks, hermits, etc.) who are spared the heat. Another example is in chapter 8, on the licentiousness of monks, explaining that only monks have the leisure to indulge in lust. This passage, in more or less the same words, can be found in *Water Margin* and other novels too. Such passages have little to do with the narrated events. They seem to be ready-made commentaries copied from novel to novel. In the Chongzhen version of *Jin Ping Mei*, however, those stock commentaries are all deleted.[32]

More important for our study are judgemental commentaries, especially morally judgemental commentaries. They are different from the explanatory commentaries in that the latter aim at helping the receivers understand the apparently strange events or characters, while judgemental ones aim at securing the readers' agreement with the narrator's value-judgements.

We have already mentioned that in oral performance, the narrator can readily switch from narrating into commenting merely by changing the para-linguistic form.

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[32] Some ancient Chinese authors seem to be aware of the banality of those commentaries. The Scholars, after the conventional opening verse, acknowledges: "*This poem tells a trite commonplace, nothing more than that*, though wealth and honor are all vain, people chase them with too much eagerness, even at the expense of their life." (RLWS, 5).

In written narration this is difficult. Traditional Chinese fiction, however, tries to simulate it by a stylistic device—inserting poems or rhymed prose. In *Jin Ping Mei*, Ximen Qing has an affair with the wife of a servant, and the narrator offers us a commentary:

> Respected Listener, no head of household should commit adultery with his slave-girls or wives of his servants. Such things will surely confound the hierarchy, give those disposed to evil the chances to take advantage, and cause the social mœurs to deteriorate, until the degeneration is beyond cure. We have a testimonial poem that says:
>
> Ximen, too lustful, confused the high and the low.
>
> The concubines all so beautiful are not enough for him.
>
> Why should he, when his wife was not home,
>
> Have an affair with a servant, confounding the norms.
>
> (JPM Cihua, Chap. 22)

Such poems are, in most cases, not much more than doggerel. Yet they are favorite forms of commentaries to unify the value-judgements in the narrative, and to control the signification of the novel so that the diffusion of interpretations will be limited.

Some scholars hold that using poems as commentaries is another device that the story-teller narrator in Chinese vernacular fiction took over from oral performance, in which the story-teller spiced his narration with singing. This again is a too simple solution to the difficult narratological problems of Chinese vernacular fiction. In fact, there are surprisingly few tunes used for the poem-commentaries in vernacular fiction, and in early vernacular fiction (supposedly closer to oral performance) there are indeed far fewer poem-commentaries.

I suggest that there is another reason for using poems as commentaries: they were there not only because of their stylistic insulation but also because of their generic superiority in the cultural hierarchy of discourses. The common leading tag of these poems—"We have a testimonial poem that says" (*youshi weizheng*)—shows that those poem s intrude from a higher cultural level. Because poems are generically endowed with this cultural superiority, the fact that most of those poems were wretched doggerels does not diminish their authority.

Commentaries are, generally speaking, less powerful as style-indicators than directions. While a single direction often suffices to mark a distinct style, only the cumulative effect of the quantity of commentaries may be recognized as such an indication. The most obvious improvement the Chongzhen version of *Jin Ping Mei* made to the *Cihua* version, as we have mentioned, was to delete a large proportion of the commentaries, thus creating a distinct new style.

The story-teller narrator in traditional Chinese novels seldom refrains from intruding wherever he sees a need, as his conventional semi-implicit position in the narrative situation provides him with unchanged authority over the narrative. However, unlike the self-conscious narrator in some eighteenth-century Western novels, the Chinese narrator holds back from flaunting his power of intrusion. His intrusions are not meant to shock, but are conventionalized, so that he does not have to be so self-conscious in intruding.

A Western reader may feel that both the narrator and the narratee (but not necessarily the characters) in traditional Chinese fiction are always too strait-laced. After the salacious description of Pan Jinlian's sexual encounter with Ximen Qing, a commentary in *Jin Ping Mei* goes:

> Since this woman began her sexual experience with Rich Zhang years ago, whenever did the old man's thing, as soft as snivel, give a brisk performance? After marrying Wu Da, Respectable Listener please imagine, how much prowess could you expect from something three inches long? Today she met Ximen Qing who had long been an honored soldier in the battlefield of debauchery. How could she not be happy? (JPM Cihua, Chap. 4)

This commentary is perhaps the farthest the narrator in Chinese vernacular fiction could allow himself to go. We can hardly imagine Diderot's or Cervantes' narrator letting such a wonderful opportunity go without making the best of it for a good laugh.

The reason why the narrator in Chinese vernacular fiction remains so ethically prudish was not so much due to the rigidity of moral codes in Chinese society but to the cultural function of this fiction. But we shall leave this particular problem to the last part of the present study.

VIII

A salient feature of late Qing fiction is the greater frequency of narrative intrusions than in any previous period of Chinese vernacular fiction. This fact, somehow, has hitherto eluded the attention of students of late Qing fiction.

The increase is more apparent with directions than with commentaries. This, I think, is ascribable to the tension caused by the modifications in the narrative frame within the conventionalized communicative pattern. The huge amount of directions trying to explain the newly adopted techniques betrays the narrator's uneasiness about the instability of his status.

A Flower in the Sinful Sea is a typical case. The author Zeng Pu could be said to be the best informed about Western literature of the major late Qing novelists. He perhaps thought that he was writing a novel drastically distinct from the traditional fiction. Yet he produced a work even more conventional than some of his less-informed contemporary colleagues, partly because the directions, which he abundantly provided for fear that the narrative technique might be too new, actually pull the novel back into conventionality.

> At the end of the last chapter, Wenqing, when stepping out of his room, gave out a mad cry and fainted on the ground. I imagine that when you read this, you told yourself that it was just a regular means to arouse your curiosity, and that it is a routine trick played by all novel writers. But this novel *A Flower in the Sinful Sea* of mine is different from any other novel in that it never stops and restarts at will in order to create a situation. There is not a single false line, or a single untrue word. I can only let the text follow the facts, not vice versa. So that day when Wenqing fell to the ground, there must be some reason that made his fall a must. The Story-Writer cannot now tell you everything about the mystery, but only continue narrating to see what happened afterwards. (NHH, 223)

This might not be the longest direction in late Qing fiction, though long directions can be found in *The Bureaucrats* (Chap. 11), in *Yi Suo's Yellow Embroidered Ball*

(Huang Xiuqiu, Chap. 6), and in many other novels. It is certainly longer than most directions in traditional vernacular fiction before the late Qing. The lengthy direction apparently defending some new technique is, in fact, offering an apology for a very conventional device, i.e. ending the chapters at a critical moment, with a couplet and a formulaic tail-phrase.

Since many late Qing novels are episodic, comprised of a linked series of stories, and mostly in direct quoted speech uttered by the characters, the continuous and lengthy direct quoting also causes uneasiness, and invites long directions. In chapter 101 of *Strange Events*, there is a peculiar direction:

> Halt! I began telling Jin Zi'an and others this story in the middle of chapter 97, and it did not end until the beginning of chapter 101. No need to ask about how much time I took in telling the story: the passage tallies more than 15 thousand characters. How can one have a breath so long? How can one go on talking for so long? You do not know that it took me three or four days to tell the story to my friends. I did not want to mention that I stopped several times, so that the story could appear as one piece. Actually during those four days, another incident happened—Gou Cai fell ill…

The uniqueness of the above direction is not only the mixture of narrating action with narrated event but the narrator's attempt to reshape the narrating by means of narratorial intrusion. The story-telling, reported in direct form, is in narratological theory, untampered (otherwise it would not be in direct quoted form), but the narratorial intrusion is so powerful that it recasts the speech.

The number of commentaries is greatly increased too. If the increase in directions is due to the adoption, or the purported adoption, of new techniques, then the no less serious increase in commentaries can only be explained by the fact that the narrator feels the threat of interpretative diversification. The widening of the scope of the subject-matter certainly adds to the pressure, as the more complicated the event is, the greater the need for common-sense commentaries. Moreover, moral commentaries become more tendentious to make the judgements unequivocal.

Since the late Qing narrator always assumes the pose of reprimander of social evils and reformer of society, this moral arrogance makes the usually banal commentaries even more intrusive. An interesting example can be found in chapter 32 of Wu Jianren's *Nine Murders*:

> Respected Reader! These are the few superstitious practices in which the Chinese believed, and the Cantonese believed more than the rest of China. That was why Su Peizhi was acting like this to fool them. I think that such a wise man as Su Peizhi could not believe in such things. He only used them to build necessary connections. (JMQY, 245)

This Su Peizhi is the Judicial Envoy specially sent from Beijing to investigate the murder case, and he disguises himself as a fortune-teller in order to infiltrate the criminal gang. But this fact is part of the suspense, not to be revealed until several chapters later when the whole gang is arrested. This narratorial commentary almost ruins the crucial suspense. The narrator takes a risk when he reveals the truth too early only to show that he is morally impeccable.

Sometimes the narrator-commentator in late Qing fiction seems to be oversensitive about his morally infallible image. In another commentary in *Nine Murders*, also about superstition, the narrator tries to stress that he is above the narrated world:

> Respected Reader! Since all these things are absurd, why should I relate them here? Because people at that time believed in them. Since they acted in that way, I have no choice but to tell it as it was. It is not because I who claim to be reforming fiction would follow these people in their superstitions. Please do not misjudge me. (JMQY, 67)

Many explanatory commentaries are provided for the same reason. In *The Nine-Tailed Tortoise*, for instance, the narrator supplies a great deal of information about the rules of the brothels, and adds "I have to make them clear one by one, lest you Respected Reader should pick fault with me." (JWG, 89) In Wu Jianren's *Strange Events of the Last Ten Years* (*Jin Shinian zhi Guaixianzhuang*) a character points out to his friends a piece of surprising news in the local newspaper:

> Respected Reader! Was it possible that Lu and Li did not read newspapers at all? Was it possible that in such a big inn no one read newspapers? How could those two not see the news until Ziliu pointed it out? You must know that those who read newspapers usually only read the most eye-catching titles. I have to explain this clearly, lest you Respected Reader say that there is a loophole in my novel. (JSNZGXZ, 64)

Never before had the narrator in Chinese fiction felt the need of this kind of desperate self-defense. Never before had the narrator been so worried about the effectiveness of his communication. One feels that the narrator of Chinese fiction now finds himself in a much more vulnerable position.[33]

Why should narratorial explicitness lead to an increase in narrative intrusions? The ultimate cause of this uneasiness is the crisis in the relationship between the gradually increasing explicitness of the narrator and the basically unchanged narratee. The narrator is trying to reaffirm this relationship with the narratee with a great number of intrusions so as to ensure an effective communication. In the several centuries of traditional vernacular Chinese fiction when the sharing of the codes was relatively stable, there was no urgent need for increased intrusions.

But the huge number of narratorial intrusions also presupposes the possibility of recovering the shared coding between the partners of the communicative frame.[34] If not, intrusions would become pointless—directions superfluous, and moral-judgement commentaries incomprehensible or unacceptable, which is exactly what today's readers feel when reading these novels.

These two factors—the sense of crisis and the possibility of recovering the coding system—together account for the abnormal increase in narratorial intrusions. They do not indicate a closeness of the communicative pair, but on the contrary, betray a

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[33] Another interesting example follows of such "garrulous" explanatory commentary: in Chap. 15 of *Strange Events*, the character changes his name, "and the Story-Writer can only follow him and call him by his new name" (JSNZGXZ, 111). Two chapter later, when that character changes back to his old name, the narrator comments: "Respected Reader! I, who am writing this novel, have no choice but to call him again by his old name." (Ibid. 125).

[34] Karl Kroeber, when analyzing George Eliot, offers an explanation: "The frequency and importance of George Eliot's authorial comments [my term: narratorial commentaries] testify to how remote she feels her narrative to be from the ready comprehension and sympathy of her audience. Eliot has been accused of being didactic, but the accusers have not always remembered that a teacher-pupil relation is likely to be a remote one." (Kroeber 1971: 47).

situation in which the communicative frame, previously secure, is now under threat of disintegration in late Qing fiction, though not it has not yet fallen apart.

IX

In May Fourth fiction, the number of narratorial intrusions dropped abruptly to a minimum. The fundamentally different way of installing the narrative frame makes the overdose of narratorial intrusions neither necessary nor possible. In most works of May Fourth fiction, the narrator tries his best to refrain from intrusions, especially from directions, reducing them to virtual non-existence. Even in the earliest May Fourth short-story collection—Yu Dafu's *Sinking* and Ye Shengtao's *Estrangement* (*Gemo*, 1921), there can be found hardly a single direction.

The few directions still to be found in May Fourth fiction generally assumed various disguises to make themselves hard to detect.[35] In Wang Tongzhao's story "Being Drunk" (Zuihou), the direction comes almost like the thought in the drunkard's mind, "What horror? In this summertime downtown?" In Feng Yuanjun's early story "Behind the Schedule'" (Wudian), directions are often combined with commentaries so that they do not reveal too much of the narratorial control of the narrative: "On one such evening, began the tragedy he had to play."

In rare cases, directions are intentionally exposed and made conspicuous so as to achieve some special effect. Shen Congwen, a skillful story-teller, sometimes played with directions. The very first sentences of his story "The Diary of a Woman" (Yige Furen de Riji) begin: "The title is 'The Diary of a Woman'. Now let me continue." These "exposed" directions are mostly ironical, purposely overdone so that the narratorial control is made dramatic.

If directions are indeed very rare, commentaries in May Fourth fiction are still common, though much fewer than in Chinese fiction of any other period. But like directions, most commentaries in May Fourth fiction appear less intrusive. Wang Tongzhao's "A Rainy Spring Night" (Chunyu Zhi Ye) ends with an exclamation, "Oh! The same rainy spring night, but each had such a different feeling!" It is hard to tell whether these are the words of the narrator or of a certain character, or shared by them.

In Ye Shengtao's stories, though there are hardly any directions, commentaries often turn up. One example from his "A Heavy Load of Sorrow" (Bei'ai de Zhongzai) reads: "The maximum capacity of the boat was forty persons, when there was not much room for the passengers to move. Yet the sorrow of humankind it carried exceeded its capacity by far too much, though it would not sink because of that weight." (GM, 67) What attenuates the intrusiveness of these commentaries is that most of them appear in first-person narratives where the thoughts of the character are sometimes hardly distinguishable from the narrator's commentaries.

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[35]Not all the narratorial intrusions in May Fourth fiction are well-disguised. There are inevitably some "sloppy" directions, awkwardly introduced. In Guo Moruo's story "Yueshi" (Moon Eclipse):

—I dreamt of Miss Uta last night.

—Oh, you did? How is she now?

When we were exchanging these few words, our scene shifted to Japan.

Narratorial intrusions are abundant in the works of some authors who are more influenced by nineteenth-century Western fiction. Lao She and Xu Dishan, for instance, are writers who use narratorial intrusions extensively. Xu's "The Spider Weaving Webs Futilely" (Zhuiwang Laozhu) relies on a great number of intrusions to link up the fast-moving story. Prusek, quoting Z. Slupski, argues that the works by Lao She "represent an old stage of European realistic prose and at the same time they are closer to the traditions of the old Chinese novel", and he explains: "Lao She starts from Dickens' novel in which the author-narrator constantly intervenes in the narration in the same way as the Chinese story-tellers."[36] This is a sharp observation.

Against the background of minimum narratological intrusions, some fiction works can now intentionally employ abundant narratorial intrusions to achieve certain goals. The first examples of such works are deliberate parodies, of which Lu Xun's *The True Story of A Q* is the best illustration. The short novel was widely imitated during the May Fourth period. The narrator in these works is flauntingly intrusive. Sometimes whole chapters, e.g. the first chapter of *The True Story of A Q*, or the sixth chapter of Xu Qinwen's *The Snivelling Second Daughter* (*Biti A Er*) consists of directions and commentaries from beginning to end. But the ironical tone of these narratorial intrusions leaves no doubt that they are installed for self-satire.

Another kind of excessive use of narratorial intrusions is serious experiments with, rather than parodies of, the "traditional" narratological conventions. Wang Luyan's "The Cannon from Xinghua" (Xinghua Dapao), Li Jianwu's "The Legend of Zhongtiao Mountains" (Zhongtiao Shan de Chuanshuo), and Jiang Guangci's "Olive" (Ganlan) are good examples. Because of the intrusions, these stories are readily reminiscent of Chinese traditional fiction, with their special stylistic effects. Most of those stories, however, were folktales retold, which was not a favorite sub-genre among May Fourth writers.

During the May Fourth period, however, there are some authors who lapse into the old narrative mode. In their works we can see a resurrection of the narratological conventions of traditional vernacular fiction. Since most May Fourth writers are well read in traditional Chinese fiction (in which they are certainly better informed than in Western fiction, though they may have admired the latter more), the habits formed by reading are bound to turn up unawares in their own writing. Those authors who are more eager to interest the readers, or more concerned with the communicative effect are particularly prone to this. In a word, writers on the popular side of the May Fourth fiction are likely to pick up the traditional techniques.

In Zhang Ziping's stories or novels, for instance, the narrator appears so intrusive that he even tried to appropriate part of the personality of the conventional semi-implicit narrator. In "Rocking Horse" (Muma): "The owner of the hostel is Lin. We shall call him Old Lin hereafter. His Japanese names are too cumbersome… Let's spare ourselves the trouble." (XDCX, 72).

Even in first-person narratives, the narrator in Zhang Ziping's works an also be so intrusive that he resembles more the conventional narrator. The numerous directions in Zhang Ziping's novel *Fossils of the Alluvial Age* makes frequent use of "dead

[36] Prusek 1980: 61.

time" by means of narrative intrusions: "I took a train trip of several hours from Mensi to my destination. I remained so gloomy all the way that I do not want to describe the trip any more. As for what happened to Miss Chen afterwards, I will not be able to tell until the time when. I see her or hear about her again." (CJQHS, 24). Such intrusions can no longer be confused with the character's "inner voice", as the narrator's time does not overlap with the character's time.

Often in Zhang Ziping's fiction, the narratee is called up to support the intrusions: "My friendship with Heming was profound. If I do not tell you the history of our friendship, you readers might accuse me of disloyalty to my friend." (CJQHS, 28). The evocation of the narratee is almost exactly the same as that in late Qing fiction, but rare in May Fourth fiction. The novel even devotes whole sections to judgemental commentaries, e.g. on church philanthropy (section 27), on crime (section 44), and on Sino-Japanese relations (section 47). This reminds us of the pages-long commentaries in traditional novels. Frequent and long intrusions can also be found in Jiang Guangci's short novel *The Sans Culottes* (*Duanku Dang*), so that some parts of the novel read almost like a political pamphlet. This novel is, regarded as the first piece of proletarian fiction in China.

X

Narrative subjectivity is important in any narrative analysis because it is the source of intentionality that influences the interpretation. It marks the intentional context which, though insufficient to determine the interpretation that also relies on other pragmatic contexts,[37] is, anyway, a context that can be examined by an analysis of the text.

In a written narrative, various personalities—the character, the narrator and the implied author—could all claim to possess narrative subjectivity by participating in the deliverance of the narrative message.[38] This is the integral repartition of the narrative subjectivity.

In a narrative text, however, there can be more than one author (as in the case of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*) or re-writer (as with *The Three Kingdoms*). There can also be several narrators either on the same level or on different levels, and there

[37] According to contemporary pragmatics, the following 5 contexts may influence the interpretation of a message: co-textual, existential, situational, intentional, and psychological contexts. Besides the intentional context, perhaps only the situational context can be said to be related to the formal analysis of the narrative text. For the 5 contexts, see Sebeok 1986, *Passim.*

[38] Tzvetan Todorov once put forward an interesting argument on the decentring of subjectivity in discourse: "Dans 'II court', il y a 'il', sujet de l'énonce, et moi, sujet de l'énonciation. Dans 'Je cours', un sujet de l'énonciation énonce s'intercale entre les deux, en prenant à chacun une partie de son contenu précédent mais sans les faire disparaître entièrement: il ne fait que les immerger. Car le 'il' et le 'moi' existent toujours: ce 'je' qui court n'est pas le même que celui qui énonce. 'Je' ne réduit pas deux à un mais de deux fait trois." (Todorov 1968: 121). Such a decentring does not occur distinctly in oral statement where the "sujet de l'énonciation enonce" is readily identical with the "sujet de l'énonciation". Only in written narration does the subjectivity in the narrative statement split into 3, which can be named in more familiar terms: subject of the narration—author; subject narrated—character; subject of the narration narrated—narrator.

can be many characters in one narrative text. This then is the distributional repartition of narrative subjectivity.

These subjective elements may or may not agree with each other in their attitude toward the narrative, since each one could assume sufficient personality to take a particular stand. The subjectivity conflict causes dramatic tension in the narrative.

The character's expropriation of the narrator's voice is frequently seen in Chinese fiction. Even in the works of the Rewriting period, with the narrator's stringent control of the discourse after repeated rewriting, the yielding of narrative voice to characters is still a common occurrence.[39]

This usurpation of narrative voice is more frequently seen in novels of the Creative period. In *Jin Ping Mei*, when Pan Jinlian, now a new concubine, succeeds in winning the favor of Wu Yueniang, Ximen Qing's wife: "Li Jiao'er and the other concubines were all annoyed, seeing that Wu Yueniang favored her by mistake. They all said, 'We are good people, but left aside. She came to the house only a few days ago, and yet she is so spoilt. Big Sister really knows nothing.'" (JPM Cihua, Chap. 9). It is not the narrator but the other concubines that would call Wu Yueniang's favoritism toward Pan Jinlian a "mistake" (Cuo'ai).[40]

In *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, the best of the traditional Chinese novels, we find a more subtle takeover of narrative voice. In chapter 21, in Baochai's presence, Xiren complains that her master Baoyu mixes too much with girls. "Hearing this, Baochai thought to herself, 'Why, this girl talks reason.' Then Baochai sat on the bed and engaged Xiren in an idle talk, asking her about her age and her family. She examined her carefully. *Her words and her mind were both so respectable*." (HLM, 376).[41] Here the "respectable" is Baochai's appreciation of Xiren, not the narrator's. Yet the statement is mixed in with the flow of narrative, not directly attributed to Baochai.

When these takeovers of the narrative voice by characters are allowed to develop, the text becomes somewhat "polyphonic" in the Bakhtinian sense. Here is an example: in Chap. 19 of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, Xiren's mother and brother came to the Jias' mansion and want to buy her back, but Xiren is not willing to go with them.

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[39] In Chap. 16 of *The Three Kingdoms*, Cao Cao is suddenly attacked by Zhang Xiu in Wancheng because he has slept with the latter's sister-in-law. Cao and his army flee hastily. "Just as Cao Cao had reached the River Yu, the *bandits-soldiers* arrived in hot pursuit." (SGYY, 39) This word "bandits-soldiers" (*zeibing*) sounds strange because throughout the novel Cao Cao is said to be the bandit of the nation (*guozei*). To give Cao Cao's enemy this deprecatory epithet, usually associated with Cao Cao himself, is justifiable only under the supposition that Cao Cao's voice takes over in this part of the narration, however short it is.

[40] Traditional Chinese critics seemed to understand this subtle narrative device. In Chap. 8 of *The Scholars*: "The next year the Prince of Ning defeated the imperial troops in Southern Jiangxi. The people there either opened the city gate or fled. Prefect Wang *resisted* unsuccessfully. He found a small boat and fled on a dark night." A contemporary commentator had a sharp eye when he pointed out: "Whence the 'resisted'? Only he himself said that he had resisted." (RLWS Variorum, 196).

[41] The modern editors (e.g. those of the edn. listed in Appendix II of this dissertation) omit any punctuation after "examined her carefully", leaving the voice of the narrator confused with that of the character. I suggest the insertion of a comma in Chinese or a stop in English.

> Her mother, seeing that her daughter was so insistent, understood that she would not leave with them. Anyway the contract had long ago been signed to have her sold. They came to try because the Jias were known for their generosity. It was not impossible that they would not have even to pay back the money. *What is more, the Jias never maltreated their slaves. There were more kind words than threats. And the chambermaids of the Jia family members received better treatment than servants of lower grades, even better than poor families treated their own daughters*: so the mother and brother gave up the idea of buying Xiren back. (HLM, 185. Italics mine.)

Here we have a value-judgement of how generous and amiable the Jia's are, which is definitely not the narrator's opinion. In fact, the narrator in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* tries his best not to provide such value-judgements, either in favor or in disfavor of the characters. The only conclusion we can draw is that this must be considered as a narrative statement with the characters' subjectivity superseding the narrator's on a large scale.[42]

XI

Since each of the elements of narrative subjectivity—authors, narrators, and characters—has his own intentions, attitudes, value-judgements, and his own way of meaning control, when they clash, the tension can make the fictional narrative both complicated and interesting.

If the elements of the compound subjectivity are on the same level—different narrators on the same narrating level, or characters on the same narrated level—they can fall into direct conflict. If, however, these elements are on different levels (e.g. a narrator and a character), they cannot clash directly since they dwell in different worlds. They may clash only when there is an interpretative effort to tidy up their opinions into a unified "meaning of the text".

In trying to find the set of values embodied in the different elements of subjectivity, we come to the spectral existence of the author. Very few authors of traditional Chinese novels left us with more than an alias. In any case, for many of the fictional works of the Rewriting period, the name of the author does not mean much, as too many hands have participated in the successive re-writings.

Yet in a narratological analysis the author is a necessary function. He is, then, regarded as a personality deduced from the narrative text, an embodiment of the set of moral, psychological, and aesthetic values which support the whole narrative. Whether this set of values is sincerely cherished by the historically existent author, or only improvised for whatever reason by him when writing the narrative, is beyond narratological concern. The function that embodies that set of values is generally called the implied author.[43]

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[42] Wong Kam-ming (1974: 103) also comments on this para., and insists that this is an example of a shift in point of view. I hesitate to agree with him, for, as I see it, shifts in point of view are always necessitated by the unfolding of the action which can be experienced or observed by this or that character. Here we find no action but the characters thinking to themselves.

[43] Wayne Booth (1983) made a great contribution to modern narratology when he first expounded the idea of the implied author. But he is ambiguous on some crucial issues concerning this concept. If this implied author is regarded as the so-called "second self" of the author, he is then "the executive

If the narrator falls into conflict with the implied author, i.e. the narrator's value-judgement is not in agreement with the expected interpretation of the whole text, narratorial unreliability occurs. Since the whole idea of reliability is dependent on interpretation, the whole idea is notoriously elusive, as there are too many contexts that could influence interpretation.

There is, however, another kind of narratorial unreliability. If the narrator, by various means such as self-doubt, abstinence from meaning control, or complete implicitness, induces suspicion of unreliability, this is what I call "built-in" narratorial unreliability, which is not totally dependent on interpretation, and, in fact, is the only kind of narratorial unreliability that can be subjected to narrative analysis.

But there is another pitfall in the idea of "built-in" unreliability. Once the narrator is suspected of unreliability, where is the reliable point of reference by which any interpreter can check his interpretation?

To answer this question, we must know that it is in the process of the narrative mediation that the unreliability sets in. In the pre-narrated state the problem of unreliability does not exist as there is no narration yet, and no narratorial subjectivity has touched it. Therefore, if we doubt that the narrative is unreliable, the only way to find the reference is to return to the pre-narrated story.

This seems impossible since the pre-narrated is amorphous. Yet a recapitulation of the pre-narrated is what we naturally (perhaps unconsciously) undertake in order to understand even the basic plot. In our reading we make necessary adjustments as mental reorganizations, e.g. reversing the flashbacks to make the story coherent, expanding the description so that we can see What the focalized character cannot see, etc. After the mental reorganization, the world, now comprehended, is the pre-narrated world rather than the narrated world. Since unreliability can occur only in the narrator's transformation of the former into the latter, reliability could be recovered by turning back the process, i.e. by erasing the narratorial mediation.[44]

Some traditional Chinese critics seem to understand this complex problem of modern criticism. Qi Liaosheng, one of the earliest critics of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, declares in his preface to the novel: "But I insist that the author may have two ideas while the reader must have only one opinion. This is like a painting where there is only one most beautiful peak for a mountain with many views; only one

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author", an agent of the actual author at the time of writing. If this implied author is a personality embodying the set of values supporting the text, then he is "the inferred author" whose identity can only be summed up through reading the narrative text.

We can say that confusion can be avoided since the two may be identical. Nevertheless, the executive implied author (the author's second self) should be identifiable with what the author was at the time of writing, whereas the inferred implied author, on the contrary, is the result of interpretation, and is fixed by the interpretation of the text.

[44] See Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 124. Ernst Kris and Abraham Kaplan in their essay "Aesthetic Ambiguity" (in Kennick, 1964: 419) expound the three criteria in straightening up a narrative: correspondence (as the interpretation should be based on historical knowledge of the subject-matter or the language); author's intention; and coherence (to organize the various parts into a coherent whole).

elegant tree for the forked creek."[45] He understands, I think, the mental reorganization in the process of reading.

Is there a narrator who is so completely reliable that his attitude toward every character and every event in the story is exactly in agreement with the implied author? Booth suggested that such a complete reliability can be found in those works where "the narrator is not dramatized",[46] i.e. as I understand it, not a participant character.

The self-characterization of the narrator, I would like to suggest, has little to do with his reliability, though it is an easy explanation of the general narratorial reliability in traditional Chinese vernacular fiction, as he never participates in the story. The most reliable narrator is the one who successfully unifies the values throughout the narrative text, making the opinion of the implied author the same as his. The narrators of Chinese fiction of the Rewriting period were, almost without exception, highly reliable since the texts were rewritten so many times that the narrator's attitude was almost inevitably reduced to a social average. It is almost impossible to get a succession of re-writers over many centuries to agree in a design of unreliability, as any unreliability is, by nature, highly individual.

Narratorial unreliability in Chinese fiction in fact started with *Jin Ping Mei* and some other late Ming fictional works. Lu Xun found in *Jin Ping Mei*:

> The author knows the world so thoroughly that his descriptions are either brisk, or twisted, or satirical as to reveal everything, or concealed as to be ironical, or talking about the two sides at the same time so that all aspects are brought out. No novel of that time is comparable with it.[47]

The most subtle narratorial unreliability in Chinese vernacular fiction, however, can be found in some of the best eighteenth-century novels.

As the narrator in the novel *The Scholars* obstinately refuses to provide any judgemental commentaries, the characters, left alone to justify their own actions, come out with a whole spectrum of rationales, leaving enough room for the divergence of subjectivity. "Negative" characters like Ma Chunshang or Kuang Chaoren show enough virtue to win our sympathy, while "positive" characters like Du Shaoqing or Yu Youzhong commit follies that make them look stupid. Even Wang Yuhui, the foolish pedant who encourages his daughter to commit suicide after her husband's death, is depicted as one faithful to his beliefs, which distinguishes him from the horde of hypocrites in the novel. Since almost all of the characters are neither positive nor negative, unreliability, then, runs through most parts of the novel.

In chapter 29 of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* the narrator offers some adjectival commentaries:

> Baoyu was born with a reprehensible disease. That was not all. Now he began to know things, and had read some depraved books, he discovered that none of the girls in all his relatives' family could be compared with Daiyu as he grew up in her company. He had long formed some idea in his mind, only unable to speak out. (HLM, 126)

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[45] Huang Lin and Han Tongwen 1982: 492.

[46] Booth 1983: 234.

[47] Lu Xun 1956: viii. 147.

Here the adjectives "reprehensible" and "depraved" are the narrator's judgemental commentaries on Jia Baoyu's disposition. But they are obviously not the implied author's opinion (i.e. not the opinion implied by the whole novel). The narratorial unreliability in this passage is pushed to such an extreme that it should be called narratorial irony.

The unreliability in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is so sophisticated that not many novels of modern times can hope to match it. For instance, the description of Feng Jie and Xue Baochai is remarkably unreliable in that it does not reward any clear-cut understanding of the two characters. The narration of many events limits itself to mere observations that offer no explanation or clue to the causality. Qin Keqing's mysterious death is left unexplained; Feng Jie's flirtation with Jia Rong, as vaguely observed by Granny Liu, is cut short and never picked up again; neither are Baoyu's relations with his sister-in-law Qin Keqing clearly stated. The narrator in these cases resembles the taciturn narrator in some twentieth-century modern novels.[48]

XII

While most late Qing fictional works are regarded in literary history as "satirical fiction" (*fengci xiaoshuo*), they are far from being narratologically ironical. On the contrary, in this period the reliability of traditional Chinese fiction is greatly reinforced.

First, most late Qing fictional works claimed eagerly that they are the carriers of truth and that their first aim is to impart the truth as faithfully as possible. In Liang Qichao's *The Future of New China*, after a character recalls the Russian invasion of Manchuria in 1902, there is a note, which in the original text first printed in the magazine *New Fiction* were set in smaller fonts, but in brackets in later editions: "The Author's note: the above were actually events that happened recently, and have been collected from Japanese newspapers, without my fabricating even one word." (XZGWLJ, 55) And after another character talks about the presence of the Russian fleet in the Pacific, there is also a note: "The Author's note: this is the latest report according to Reuters on the fourteenth of this month." (XZGWLJ, 59)

Those notes cannot be taken as the explanatory intrusion by the narrator, since the narrator has to talk at the moment of the narrating now which, according to the novel, is 2062 $_{AD}$ when China is celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the success of the Reformist Movement. This is the author's direct intervention, as the author talks from the writing now, when he could cite the news report in 1902 as "the latest". The author's voice strips the text of its narrative casing and destroys the fictionality of the novel reducing it to a political pamphlet. Such is the price the late Qing writers were ready to pay for pursuing "factual reliability".

[48] Some scholars (e.g. David Hawkes) argue that the novel has been rewritten so many times by the author, and there exist so many MS versions that there are bound to be inconsistencies. But obviously some of the "cut-short" descriptions are intentionally arranged. See Hawkes's introduction to *The Story of the Stone* (1973: i. 39).

The obsession with narratorial reliability is also demonstrated in the straightforward moralizing of narrative text. A most conspicuous and intrusive practice is to give the characters names that indicate what kind of people they are. In Li Boyuan's *The Bureaucrats*, there is a character with the name Tao Ziyao (the pronunciation resembles The Escapee), and in the novel he indeed flees from his responsibility. There is also a character Diao Maipeng (a playing on Betrayer of Friends), and he lives up to his name in the novel. There are also in the novel names like Jia Xiaozi (Faked Filial Piety), Zhen Shoujiu (Real Old Hat), Wei Qiao, with the alternative name Zhugang (together hinting at Blackmailer), and many others. In another novel by him, *A Short History of Civilization* (*Wenming Xiaoshi*), there are Xin Mingci (Neologism), Kang Bodu (Comprador), and Liu Xuesheng (Returnee Student), who work for a fashionable publisher. When in the novel *A Sea of Remorse*, the boy protagonist meets with someone named Xin Shuhuai (Evil Heart) and befriends him on his way to Shanghai, we know that the boy is in trouble, and he cannot help but be ruined after a few chapters. This practice goes to such an excess that the name Gou Cai (Dog's Stuff) was used in several novels by different authors: in Wei Xiuren's *The Flowers and the Moon* (Hua Yue Hen), in Wu Jianren's *Strange Events*, and in Li Boyuan's *The Bureaucrats*.[49] In modern Chinese literature this crude naming-stereotyping was resurrected in the Yan'an literature of the 1940s and in the "model Peking opera" during the Cultural Revolution of 1966–76.

In this way, characters are turned into stereotypes, and their behavior morally predetermined before the action takes place. These names are actually commentaries, more direct than the nicknames in the traditional vernacular novel *Water Margin* or *Three Heroes and Five Gallants* (*Sanxia Wuyi*), because the nicknames in those novels are mostly description of the characters unique "humor", and generally do not foreshadow the development of the plot.

Because of the moral zeal, exaggerations are almost abusively employed in late Qing fiction, which prompted Lu Xun to the criticism of it "revealing too much the edge of its language" (*cifeng tailu*).[50] The name he gave to late Qing fiction—Reprimanding fiction instead of Satirical fiction—is quite justifiable in this sense.

Some of the late Qing critics in fact knew what was going wrong:

> Today's social fiction, though published in huge quantity, suffers from a common problem—exhaustiveness… For social fiction, the more covert it is, the more interesting it appears. When we read *The Scholars* no one can help being fascinated by the descriptions which are as subtle and miraculous as the celestial tripod made by God Yu… Yet the author of The Scholars does not provide even one word of praise or blame for the characters.[51]

Narratorial unreliability, nevertheless, is not totally absent from late Qing fiction. In some of the best novels of the period narratorial unreliability takes the form of overstatement. In Chap. 2 of *A Flower in the Sinful Sea* there is a commentary on the Zhuangyuan (Number One Winner in the Imperial Examination):

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[49] This is reminiscent of some pre-modern moralist novels in the West, e.g. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress.*

[50] Lu Xun 1956: viii. 245.

[51] Yuxue Sheng, "Xiaoshuo Conghua", in *A Ying,* 1960: 80.

> I believe that you, my compatriots, have never read *Records of the Successful Candidates*, and do not know what a great honor it is to be Zhuangyuan. This person is not to be found in any country in the world except in China; and only one in three years. This fortunate person must enjoy the charitable and pious deeds accumulated by three generations of his ancestors; he must never in his life be led to transgress by women; he must not only be able to write properly worded essays but also be well acquainted with the big names in the capital. Once he has won the title, he becomes a leader of the immortals and disciple of the emperor himself. His prosperity and wisdom should scare away Su Dongpo or Li Taibai, let alone Bacon of England or Rousseau of France. (NHH, 5)

This is an overstatement, not an exaggeration. Its intended meaning runs contrary to the surface meaning, while an exaggeration is meant to reinforce the meaning in the same direction. Exaggerations abound in late Qing fiction, on almost every page of every novel: in Wu Jianren's *China Now* (*Zhongguo Xianzao Ji*), the fashionable reformists in Shanghai convene a meeting of suffragettes and make a mess of everything; in Li Boyuan's *The Hell for the Living*, one magistrate after another takes simple-minded pleasure in all kinds of unimaginable tortures. In comparison with these passages, the overstatement in *A Flower in the Sinful Sea*, though not at all subtle, sounds much better.

In a very small number of late Qing novels, or, more exactly, in some parts of these novels, there appears the "no comments" form of unreliability—a refusal to provide any moral judgement. In *Strange Events*, for instance, the protagonist-narrator Jiusi Yisheng despises an official career, but he buys an official title for himself since "it does not cost much". He hates to make money by crooked means, but he helps his friend Wen Shunong to counterfeit antiques and cheat customers. He is never tired of visiting brothels though he obviously enjoys telling ugly stories about prostitutes and their patrons.

The only real hero in the novel, Wu Jizhi, acting as the elder brother of the protagonist and his guardian in this wicked world, proclaims his philosophy that the most important thing in life is just "to muddle along" (*hun*), and that in the face of evil, the most important thing to do is "not to lay it bare", because "to lay it bare means a wet blanket, and a wet blanket means repugnance. With repugnance everywhere, you can no longer muddle along in this world." Thus, in Chap. 14, when everyone in the office accepts a part of a bribe, he does not refuse to take his share.

The same narratorial unreliability can be found more or less in *A Flower in the Sinful Sea* or *The Travels of Lao Can.* After reading the former we really do not know whether the heroine Caiyun should be considered a voluptuous whore with an evil heart, or a bold woman who dares to take her fate in her own hands. This is a more difficult achievement than that in *Strange Events* because the narrator in *A Flower in the Sinful Sea* is not participant, as in the latter, but remains the impersonal semi-implicit story-writer who is in a position designed to comment.

By refusing to let good people be rewarded and bad people be punished, and by refusing to criticize or praise anyone, and more importantly, by making it difficult to judge a character by a consistent code, the anti-heroism tones down the moral urgency of these few novels and makes them unique in late Qing Reprimanding fiction. But what is more important to our analysis is that since the narrator is no

longer the executive for the positive values and commonly accepted moral norms, there then appears a certain, though limited, distance between the narrator and the implied author—the basic requirement of an unreliable narrator.

XIII

The relationship between the elements of narrative subjectivity forms a certain narrative scheme. Different schemes are formed by the varying distances between those elements.

In most traditional Chinese vernacular fiction (with the notable exceptions of some eighteenth-century masterpieces), the narrative is fairly reliable and there can be found almost no difference between the values expressed by the impersonal semi-implicit narrator and those embodied by the implied author. In a reliable narrative, the distance between the implied author and the narrator (and that between the implied reader and the narratee as well) is short. When narrative reliability is absolute, the positions of the narrator-narratee pair and the implied author-implied reader pair virtually overlap.

In late Qing Reprimanding fiction the reliability of the narrative is strengthened at the expense of the characters as most of them are objects of ridicule. In this caricature scheme the distance between the narrator and the characters is increased, as he is morally much higher than them.

In Butterfly romance fiction we find an opposite scheme of equal, if not more serious, reliability, where the narrator is not only reliable but refuses to keep a distance from the character. Thus all the participants of the narrative communication collapse into a direct sharing of feelings and values.

Such a scheme, as exemplified by Butterfly fiction, needs a special audience that would unquestioningly identify with the implied reader. If a reader cannot feel completely comfortable in sharing those emotions, this "squeezed-together" communication pattern becomes repugnant to him.

Such a narrative scheme is rarely seen in May Fourth fiction, where in most cases the narrator maintains a rather great distance from the implied author. In some works, there appear asymmetrical schemes, i.e. the distance between the narrator and the implied author is greater than that between the narratee and the implied reader.

By definition, the narrator knows everything no matter how much he actually reveals, but the narratee is kept in the dark as he is denied sufficient information. This can be observed in the so-called "open-ended" fictional works where the future of the character is left untold. In traditional vernacular fiction, open-endedness is a rare exception, while in May Fourth fiction, open-endedness becomes the rule as the majority of works pick up only a section of the story with much left untold. For example, we do not know whether the protagonist of Yu Dafu's "Sinking" really committed suicide in the sea, or, if he did not, how he will survive his hypochondria.

This scheme also applies to those narratives where crucial information is withheld all through the narrative until the very end. Although at the end all the information is supplied in these narratives, the narrative as a temporal process has already benefited from this withholding. Detective stories are the most typical example of this narrative scheme. In May Fourth fiction we can find many other works of fiction playing on this

kind of information-withholding. Wang Luyan's story "Juying's Wedding" (Juying de Chujia) is an example: the description of a fanfare village wedding goes on until the end of the story, when it is revealed that both the bride and the groom died long ago, and that this is only a "spiritual wedding" to console the grieved parents and, hopefully, the deceased in another world. In such a narrative scheme, the narratee knows much less than the narrator. The asymmetry remains as the motive force for the development of the plot until the very end, when it is redressed.

The narrative schemes described above are all reliable ones, in which the distance between the narrator and the implied author is relatively short. In unreliable schemes, however, the marked distinction between the narrator's stand and that of the implied author distances the two.

The lack of moral thoroughness seems to be the only type of narrative unreliability in traditional Chinese fiction, including the late Qing fiction. In these few works there appears a greater distance between the implied author (who does not have too good an opinion of, for instance, Feng Jie in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* or the Uncle in *Strange Events*) and the narrator who refuses to make any depreciatory comments about those characters. Yet, even though there is narratorial unreliability, the narrative scheme is still symmetrical, as the narratee-implied reader relationship basically mirrors that between the narrator-implied author.[52]

In many May Fourth fictional works, however, the distance between the character and the narrator (and the narratee) is reduced since what the narrator says and feels does not necessarily carry much more authority than that which the character says or feels. In many of the May Fourth works of fiction the narrator is sufficiently personalized that he is in fact no more authoritative than the characters. In *The True Story of A Q*, for instance, the narrator's intrusions can never be taken as the implied author's opinion. The narrator is sarcastic about A Q's tragedy, but the implied author, as the embodiment of the values of the whole text, is more sympathetic toward the protagonist. The unreliability of narration is thus intensified into a narrative irony which brings the narrator into direct conflict with the implied author.

In a totally "behaviorist" objective narrative such as Lu Xun's "Medicine" or "A Public Example", the narrator is almost totally effaced, i.e. he definitely refuses to offer any opinion on the events he narrates.[53] Some of Ye Shengtao's stories also adopted this "callous observer" scheme, as he himself confessed: when writing, he

[52]Booth (1983: 278) holds that the position of the implied author and the implied reader can be asymmetrical. This, I think, is against the very definition of implied author-reader. The implied reader can only be regarded as the mirror image of the implied author. He is the *expected* acceptance of the set of values inferred from the narrative. Booth, inventor of this pair of concepts, is here confusing the implied author-reader relationship with the actual author-reader relationship.

[53]This reminds us of Zhang Dinghuang's comment on Lu Xun's fiction in 1923: "We do not know how advanced he was in his study of medicine. We do not know whether he ever practiced surgery. But we know that his fiction has three characteristics which belong to an experienced surgeon: *the first is coldness, the second is coldness; the third is again coldness*… Has there ever been such a resolute exposer? Has there ever been such a taciturn observer?" ("Mr Lu Xun" in Tai Jingnong [ed.], *Guanyu Luxun Ji Qi Zhuzuo* [Shanghai: Kaiming Shudian, 1933]. Italics mine.).

loved to "watch with cold eyes".[54] His story "The Welcome" (Huanying) relates how in a small town the local celebrities gather to hear John Dewey the American philosopher—which might well be a hilarious episode in late Qing Reprimanding fiction. Yet the narrative in this story is extremely "unfeeling", so that in the whole story there seems to be mere objective observation with no apparent narrative mediation. The narrative irony, too subtle even for professional readers, has made some literary historians regret that this short story is "dull" and "dragging". Ling Shuhua's story "The Mid-Autumn Night" (Zhongqiu Ye), which won high praise from C. T. Hsia, relates how the happy marriage of a young couple is ruined, starting with a quarrel over the holiday feast. The husband and the wife each hold on to a different explanation of the small incident and its tragic result, but since the narrator remains reticent, refusing to give any judgement, the blind cruelty of fate seems to be more mysterious.

For unreliable narratives, there is also an asymmetrical possibility. When the narrator is a character, and thus morally questionable, his distance from the implied author can be considered greater than that between the implied reader and the narratee not yet turned into a morally fallible character or even remaining completely implicit. In Li Jinming's "In a Boat", for instance, the narrator-protagonist—a "cowardly seducer"—is morally low in the eyes of the implied author. We can only infer that the narratee should not be equally lacking in moral sense though he does not appear in the narrative.

But in a few May Fourth fictional works the narratee is often characterized too, and the asymmetry in the communication scheme is no longer a mere conjecture. In Xu Dishan's "Undeliverable Letters" (Wufa Toudi de Xin) the narrator-protagonist addresses various people who, for different reasons, refuse to correspond with the narrator—the lonely and mad letter writer. And we can consider that the narratees are nearer to the implied author-reader pair, as they seem to be more sober in refusing to receive those letters.

Sometimes a characterized narrator weak in moral or in intellect has to tell the whole narrative from a lower point of view, as if looking up to the narrated events at an angle of elevation. This particular unreliable "angling-up" scheme can be found in many May Fourth fiction works. In Wang Tongzhao's story "The Child on the Lake Shore" (Huban Eryu), the narrator, a child wandering aimlessly amid the reeds on the lake shore, tells how his father does not allow him to go home until late, and then the truth is gradually revealed that the child's iron-smith father is unable to feed the family and his mother is working as a prostitute at home. The narrator, intellectually weak, is unable to understand what he himself relates, but the narratee, an adult who hears his story, sees the true situation.

A similar unreliable scheme can be found in some fictional works with the deceptively sentimental narrator. Chen Xianghe's "Mourning—" (Dao—) is a very sentimental romance told by a miserable husband after his young wife's death. But in the end we find that it was the annoyingly childish wife made "me" so impatient, and that "I" cruelly locked her out in the snow, so that she died because of the cold. The

[54] Preface, *Ye Shengtao Xuji*, Shanghai: Kaiming Shudian, 1952, 4.

sentimentalism is subverted by this revelation of stupidity on both sides. Lu Xun's story "Lament for the Deceased" (Shangshi) relating the sad separation of the young protagonist from his wife is a better example as the romance turns sour because of the incompetence of both parties in coping with the pressure of life. The narratorial unreliability now acquires a thematic profundity as the narratorial unreliability encourages interpretative diversification.

Chapter 9
The Cultural Status of Chinese Fiction

I

Chinese culture has all along displayed a pyramidic structure which presents itself as a rigid generic hierarchy of discourses.[1] The Confucianist scriptures and official dynastic historiography at the top of the hierarchy enjoyed almost absolute authority, and were never seriously challenged after the canonization of Confucianism around the second century $_{BC}$, and re-canonization by the Neo-Confucianists in the twelfth century $_{AD}$.

In accord with Confucianist social philosophy, a "scale of meaning-power" is spread over the generic hierarchy of cultural discourses, fading off towards the end of the range, leaving the lower strata of social activities very similar to what modern Western sociologists call the sub-cultural discourses. Chinese vernacular fiction, being one of the genres at the very bottom of the generic pyramid, possesses a series of strongly sub-cultural characteristics.

No problem concerning Chinese vernacular fiction can be understood without taking into consideration its particular cultural position. We can have a look at C. T. Hsia's accusation against *Jin Ping Mei*:

[1] Jurii Lotman and A. M. Pjatigorskij in their essay "Text and Function" suggest that there are two types of culture: the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic:

> Paradigmatic cultures create a single hierarchy of texts with a constant intensification of textual semiotics such that at the summit is found a culture's Text, which has the greatest indices of value and truth. Syntagmatic cultures create a set of various types of texts that comprise various aspects of reality and are thought to be equal in value. These principles are complexly interwoven in the majority of actual human cultures. (Lucid 1977: 130–1)

The two terms are unnecessarily difficult as their definitions here are obviously different from those in semiotics. The two kinds of relationships of cultural discourses in different societies can perhaps be better termed as parallel and pyramidic.

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Y. Zhao, *The River Fans Out*, China Academic Library,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6_9

> I gave a very careful reading to *Jin Ping Mei Cihua* version years ago, but since then I have never had the appetite to read it again. The artistic crudity is not the main reason for my objection. The whole novel does not represent in any way the true spirit of Chinese culture.[2]

In the same article he also makes a similar charge against *Water Margin*, though in less severe terms.[3] Thereupon he suggests excluding the two novels from the list of masterpieces of Chinese vernacular fiction.

I am not here to argue for the merit of *Jin Ping Mei* or other novels. My question is rather: should, or could, a vernacular novel, especially those of the Rewriting period, hope to be an embodiment of the "true spirit of Chinese culture" of traditional Chinese society?

If the generic structure of traditional Chinese culture had not been a pyramidic but a "parallel" one, any text could at least hope to embody part of the "true spirit" of that culture. For instance, both avant-garde art and pulp magazine literature in modern society can be taken as the embodiments of different aspects of the "true spirit" of that culture, as they function more or less independently of each other. Chinese vernacular fiction, however, is generically too subordinate to the culturally dominant discourses—historiography, poetry, *guwen* essays, and others—to function independently in cultural signification. It serves as their popularized illustrations. Therefore, vernacular fiction could not be representative but diluted expositions of Chinese culture. If in some vernacular fiction works the social unconscious, usually silenced, is let loose, it is still not the "true spirit of Chinese culture" that is expected to show up. Hsia's accusation is the result of a misguided approach to Chinese vernacular fiction.

This is not to deny that Chinese vernacular fiction is also a product of Chinese culture. Sub-cultural discourses, even in a pyramidic culture, are coded with the same ideological system. Therefore, we are bound to be disappointed with Chinese vernacular fiction if what we seek is not the sub-culturally distorted signification but a direct embodiment of the acknowledged values of Chinese culture.

Apart from the subordinated, there exists another possible group of non-mainstream discourses—the counter-cultural. This group of texts moves itself out of the discursive hierarchy, and refuses to be measured on the generic scale. It asserts its own values in defiance of the norms.

Though cultural deviations repeatedly showed up in Chinese history, they were only recognizable in a limited scope and in an ambiguous manner in some Chinese vernacular novels, and never developed into a fully fledged discursive mode until the May Fourth period.

Since sub-cultural and counter-cultural are two essential concepts to my analysis in this part, a brief description of the two is perhaps not inappropriate here.[4]

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[2]Hsia 1975: 5. English translation mine.

[3]Hsia continues, "The errantry extolled in *Water Margin* is anything but moderate. The whole novel is stuffed with cruel and sadistic scenes which represent the unrestrained side of Chinese culture.".

[4]On this issue I have greatly benefited from recent sociological studies on youth delinquency, and on the Hippy movement that spread in the West two decades ago. The two terms—sub-culture and counterculture—began to be widely used only after the social disturbances of the 1960s. I hesitated

I understand that any theoretical framework is dangerous in a cultural study since it could impose the observer's intention upon the observed. No one, however, can approach his object of study without a tentative, ready to be corrected, methodological framework. And what is more, what I shall describe below is not actually a preconception but a conclusion after years of research and study of the cultural functions of Chinese vernacular fiction. By exposing it before the actual discussion, I am merely trying to highlight the crucial issues so that they will not be neglected.

If, as I suggested in the introduction to this book, we consider all cultural activities as various types of discourse for signification, the sub-cultural discourses and counter-cultural discourses differ in the following respects: their practitioners are different. Sub-cultural discourses are likely to be produced for the culturally and educationally underprivileged section of society, who incline to a more readily comprehensible form of signification; counter-cultural discourses are more likely to be produced for professional or semi-professional reception by the educationally privileged sections of society.

Their expected mode of consumption is different: sub-cultural discourses are unequivocally produced for leisure; counter-cultural discourses tend to blur the distinction between "work" and "pastimes", and are seemingly more serious.

Their duration is different: the subculture is a more stable institution, though subject to a gradual change of style; the counter-culture is more likely to be linked to a crisis of the cultural discursive structure, thus presenting itself as a rupture in the normal evolutionary process of the culture.

Their ways of deviating from mainstream culture are different: sub-cultural discourses, even when frowned upon by the establishment as aberrant, do not challenge the basic interpretative system; the counter-cultural discourses take a more overtly ideological stand, consistently articulating their challenge to the established discursive norms.

In subculture, a series of apparent characteristics manifest themselves as specific styles,[5] which look deviant only superficially. Such a deviance actually defuses the possible threat of sub-cultural discourses against the dominant cultural discourses. The counter-culture, on the contrary, is constructed on an intentional confusion of codes, thus posing a more serious challenge to the discursive structure.

Finally, they are different in the way they resolve their conflict with the cultural norms: the sub-cultural discourses passed from generation to generation, thus forcing the cultural establishment to tolerate them. They institutionalize their particularity in style, in appearance, in attitudes, and in other aspects, making themselves a necessary complementary element, even a safety valve, in the culture so that the norms of the latter could effectively cover society; counter-cultural discourses emerge only at

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for a long time over the question of whether it was advisable to apply these conceptions, which are derived entirely from modern sociological study of contemporary Western society. After much thought, however, I came to believe that, given the necessary modifications, these terms can be appropriated in a more or less satisfactory manner to describe two diametrically different phases in the development of Chinese fiction.

[5]Hebridge insisted that the sub-cultural is demonstrated more on the signifier level than on the signified level (1980: passim).

the moment of crisis and, though antagonistic to the dominant culture, play a very important role in the service of the whole culture by testing possible re-orientations. Though never able to push the culture exactly in their desired direction, the counter-cultural discourses give the cultural structure some flexibility in handling the crisis.

Therefore, although both the sub-cultural and the counter-cultural are deviant to the norms, there is a great difference between them. At the risk of simplification, we can say that subculture is generally conservative as it helps to maintain the ideology of the culture, whereas counterculture is subversive by nature as it aims at changing this ideological system.

II

Chinese historians and bibliographers have always had difficulty in categorizing fiction. It seems that the very idea of fictionality baffled the Chinese cultural establishment. The first categorizing attempt was made by the renowned historian Ban Gu in the first century $_{BC}$ who defined *xiaoshuo* (literally "small talk") as "gossip and hearsay in the streets". Although *xiaoshuo* writers were listed as the last of the ten categories of writers, Ban Gu warned that "only the former nine are worth reading".[6] The fifteen books he listed under the heading *xiaoshuo* were all lost as early as the Sui Dynasty (sixth century $_{AD}$), but we can see from the titles that they were works of various types that Ban Gu was unable to place under the other nine headings. At that time, and for centuries after that, *xiaoshuo* was generically defined by its indefinability.[7]

No matter how chaotic the categorization of *xiaoshuo* was, it rarely included vernacular fiction. Hu Yinglin in his *Notes of Shaoshi Shanfang* (*Shaoshi Shanfang Bicong*) divided *xiaoshuo* into six types, and Ji Yun in his weighty *Digests of Siku Collectanea* (*Siku Quanshu Tiyao*) discussed three types of fiction. Neither of them mentioned vernacular fiction at all. Actually the term *xiaoshuo* had hardly been applied to vernacular fiction before the late Qing, and even then the old term *shuobu* (*story-telling books*) remained the formal literary-language term for vernacular fiction.

Strictly speaking, Chinese vernacular fiction was not a culturally well-defined genre or sub-genre until the beginning of this century. Even as late as the late Qing, vernacular fiction was still mixed with other popular narrative genres such as drama or balladry. Liang Qichao's essay "Scattered Notes about Fiction" (Xiaoshuo Lingjian)

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[6] Huang Lin and Han Tongwen, 1982: 2.

[7] Before literary-language short stories emerged in the 7th century, there had been at least two kinds of works which could be called *xiaoshuo* in the modern sense (i.e. fiction)—fantasies like *The Book of Mountains and Seas* (*Shan Hai Jing*) and *The Book of Supernatural Things* (*Shengyi Jing*), and legends such as *The Private Life of the Hanwu Emperor* (*Hanwu Di Neizhuan*) and *The Life of Donfang Shuo* (*Dongfang Shuo Zhuan*). Yet in the Bibliography attached to each official dynastic history such books are placed under *Shibu Dilei* (History—Geographical Books), or under *Shibu Zalei* (History—Miscellaneous). In *The New History of the Tang* (*Xin Tang Shu*), under the general editorship of Ouyang Xiu in the 11th century, however, the books listed under *Xiaoshuo* are more or less in agreement with its modern meaning: fiction. However, the inclusion of such non-fiction books as Lu Yu's *The Book of Tea* (*Cha Jing*) indicates that the term still covers a much wider area than what is considered fiction today.

covered three *chuanqi* plays; Tian Liaosheng's "On the History of Chinese Fiction" (Zhongguo Lidai Xiaoshuo Lun) included in its discussion *biji* prose of the Tang Dynasty, *zaji* prose of the Song, drama of the Yuan and *tanci* ballads of the Qing. Similar generic confusion was common before May Fourth.

Official dynastic histories almost never stooped to mention vernacular fiction, as if it were a disgrace to the culture. The compilers of the local histories (*fangzhi*) shared the same attitude. They would mention all the folk rituals and festivities, but hardly anything about vernacular writing or publishing, which obviously were tolerated in practice but were not to be recognized in the record of culture. In the local history of Anhui, for instance, the editions before the founding of the Republic in 1911 mention Wu Jingzi briefly in less than forty characters and nothing about his life-work, the vernacular novel *The Scholars*. The early twentieth-century editions of the local history give him a longer entry, but *The Scholars* is still mentioned only in passing, after his other long-lost poetry and prose collections. *The Scholars* is one of the most "Literati" works of Chinese vernacular fiction. Other writers had even less hope of being mentioned in local histories.

The cultural position of vernacular fiction was not far from such cultural "discourses" as prostitution. The comparison sounds strange, but is unequivocally documented. There were many government decrees after the founding of the Ming Dynasty in the fourteenth century, imposing a ban with severe punishment on the practice of all kinds of sub-cultural "discourses"—fiction, drama, balladry, together with popular cults, paranormal communication, prostitution, etc. Emperor Kang Xi's decree of the fourth month of 1709 promulgated "a strict and perpetual prohibition against omen-rites, drawing magic figures, obscene balladry, or fiction." Another decree five years later stated:

> I rule the country on the basis of proper mœurs. In order to rectify social mœurs, it is imperative to favor the study of the Scriptures and strictly ban blasphemous books. This is an unalterable rule. Recently there have been seen in book markets numerous fictional works that abound in nonsense and vulgarity far from proper reason. Not only the foolish common people are seduced, even gentry and scholars who browse through them are tempted. This is no small matter in regard to social mœurs. Those books should be banned strictly without exception.[8]

Like other sub-cultural activities, vernacular fiction could hope to enjoy some tolerance on the part of the dominant culture, despite the repeated decrees of suppression. Except for some short periods, there was not much effective suppression of the subculture in China so long as these discursive activities stayed in subordination, and not even much complaint if it remained in the oral sphere.

Nevertheless, the generic hierarchy of Chinese culture could not stand any confusion. In Chinese historical documents we can see constant efforts to preclude the danger. The Wanli Emperor of the Ming issued a decree in 1602 forbidding using "words taken from fiction" in official memorandums. In 1728, the Yongzheng Emperor of the Qing severely punished a high-ranking official by removing him

[8] Wang Chuanxiao, 1958: 35.

from office and making him stand in the pillory in public for three months simply for a brief allusion to *The Three Kingdoms* in his memorandum presented to the court.[9]

It was not only the Imperial Court that was excessively strict in applying generic distinctions. The literati seemed to be even more finicky about them. In Yuan Mei's *Suiyuan Shihua* there are recorded several anecdotes about how some fine poets used historical allusions drawn from the novel *The Three Kingdoms*, and they "spent the rest of their life in remorse after being singled out as ridiculous". Similar accusations can be found in Hu Yinglin's *Notes of Shaoshi Shanfang* which argues that self-respecting literati "must spit" on poems using allusions to "nonsensical" fiction.

This does not mean that all Chinese men of letters colluded in the discrimination against vernacular fiction. The first serious challenge to the hierarchy of discourses occurred in the late Ming and the early Qing. Represented by Li Zhi and Jin Shengtan, several generations of literati, in the more liberal-minded south, tried to re-evaluate vernacular literature. They carefully edited vernacular literature, and invented the "marginal notes" criticism suitable for vernacular fiction. They made a great contribution to the development of Chinese fiction. But they hardly ever challenged the generic hierarchy of Chinese culture. There were indeed a few critics who tried to raise the cultural position of some of the best vernacular novels. Their witty remarks, though appreciated by readers of vernacular fiction, were generally regarded by mainstream literati as the crazy remarks of eccentrics.

Late Qing critics tried to justify the resurgence of vernacular fiction by extolling it in high-sounding words, claiming it to be the most important genre in literature. Exaggerations of the function of Chinese fiction did not come only from editors who wanted to boost the sale of fiction magazines, but also from political leaders of the reformist movements.[10]

Each wave of effort at the promotion of vernacular fiction yielded a good harvest in fiction writing: the late-Ming-early-Qing re-evaluation heralded the great achievements of eighteenth-century fiction; the late Qing re-evaluation brought about the flourishing of late Qing fiction. Despite all these efforts, however, vernacular fiction was not able to break away from its sub-cultural position.

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[9]Ibid. 287.

[10]Liang Qichao made the following groundless claim: "Reading the history of Western civilization, we can always find that in no matter which nation and or period, writers of literature are always the greatest contributors to civilization. The people worship these masters." (Liang Qichao 1941: x. 56).

Kang Youwei, the foremost leader of the reformists, urged his disciple Liang in a poem in 1900 to adopt this stand toward popular fiction:

> I want to save the nation but have no means, I frown in hesitation when the sky is overcast.…Common people are all fond of this,Good reading accessible to both the upper and the low.When I visit bookstores in ShanghaiWhat books enjoy the best sales?Historiography cannot compete with eight-legged essaysWhich in turn have to yield to fiction.In our land today this school is prevalentTurning the Six Arts into Seven Peaks. (Kang Youwei 1900: 232).

The re-evaluation efforts during the sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries were isolated ones, limited to some deviant members of the literati. The failure in late Qing re-evaluation was ascribable to the overly practical aim of using vernacular fiction for political education.

Liang Qichao, the leading reformist who was also the most influential promoter of vernacular fiction, revealed his true intention in his well-known apology for vernacular fiction in "Scattered Notes About Fiction":

> The barely literate may not be able to read the Confucian Scriptures but they definitely read fiction. That is why when it is impossible to teach them the Canons, teach them with fiction; when it is impossible to teach them history, teach them with fiction; when it is impossible to teach them philosophical analects, teach them with fiction; when it is impossible to teach them the laws, teach them with fiction.[11]

Here, the traditional generic hierarchy was well preserved, with the position of fiction not altered at all.

Since the whole idea was simply to create some "improved" reading material for the "barely literate", it was only natural that when the political aim disappeared, these enthusiastic apologists lost interest in vernacular fiction. This explains why, a decade later after his hyperbolic praise of fiction, Liang Qichao turned around to accuse vernacular fiction of debasing the Chinese people, and, when asked to recommend Chinese classics (*guoxue*) to young readers, he refused to include any vernacular fiction in his list, cautioning young people "not to read fiction at all unless you want to become fiction writers."[12] In his mind, fiction had never had a high position, and his endorsement of fiction was for no other purpose than reformist propaganda.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of late Qing fiction to the changing of the cultural status of vernacular fiction was that it encouraged a generic mixture: the same magazines could carry vernacular fiction as well as literary-language fiction; the same foreign novel was translated into literary language and the vernacular; the same author could write in both vernacular and in the literary language. This mixture greatly helped the final subversion of the generic hierarchy of cultural discourses in the May Fourth period.

The May Fourth Movement shattered this hierarchy by completely eliminating the demarcation line between literary-language fiction and vernacular fiction. The vernacular was refined by the May Fourth writers to such a degree and used so effectively for all genres that the literary language finally became obsolete and was pushed into disuse, thus removing the linguistic obstacle for vernacular fiction to rise above the sub-cultural level.

Hu Shi in his famous essay "Wenxue Gailiang Chuyi" (A Modest Proposal for the Improvement of Literature) in the January 1917 issue of *New Youth*, which ushered in the May Fourth "Literature Revolution", talked mainly about the reform of the Chinese vernacular as a tool for producing decent literature. He summed up his opinions in an eight-point proposal, in mild words with no revolutionary fanfare at all.

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[11] Liang Qichao, 1941: i. 34.

[12] Ibid. iii. 287.

Those who try to belittle Hu Shi's contribution argue that he was by no means the first one to advocate the use of the vernacular.[13] This is true, but the previous advocates of the vernacular had the same attitude as the late Qing fiction apologists—they wanted to use the vernacular only to serve the barely literate. That was why even their articles advocating the vernacular and the magazines carrying those articles were, paradoxically, in literary language. Their proposal, then, amounted to a mere readjustment within the traditional generic hierarchy.

The paradox is dramatized in Liang Qichao's novel *The Future of New China*, in which the protagonist Dr Kong gives a speech in the year 2050, at the centenary celebration of the successful modernization of China. In his speech Dr Kong retells a debate between two reformists:

> When Mr Huang and Mr Li were debating this issue, Dr Kong was of course not present. How could he know it? How could he recite the whole text without leaving out a word? Because when he was studying abroad, he wrote a *biji* book with the title *Sailing with the Wind*, in chapter 4 of which the whole text of this debate was all recorded. During his speech, Dr Kong was reading the text verbatim. All he did was to turn its literary language into vernacular. *I, the scribe, saw all this with my own eyes.* (XZGWLJ, 43–4. Italics mine.)

The arch-reformist Liang Qichao, himself enthusiastically advocating and seriously writing a vernacular novel, believed that more than one hundred years later the vernacular would be merely the language to address the common people, and that the literary language would still be used for books!

Before Hu Shi's proposal, in 1914, the Butterfly magazine *Fiction Pictorial* (*Xiaoshuo Huabao*) had begun to use vernacular exclusively. Since it was a fiction magazine, and fiction had long been written in the vernacular, the magazine was declared to be dedicated to vernacular fiction exclusively, which was claimed to be "suitable for everyone": housewives, students, merchants, and workers.[14] Against such a background, Hu Shi's seemingly modest proposal to adopt the vernacular, till then a tool for sub-cultural discourses, for use in élite genres, was indeed launching a fundamental challenge to Chinese culture.

Many writers at this time began to remould the Chinese vernacular to make it a medium applicable for élite genres. Hu Shi praised Zhou Zuoren's "literal" translation of Western fiction as "the starting-point for the Europeanization of Chinese". Fu Sinian, the most active among Hu Shi's disciples, argued that "people's speech" alone was not enough for the remoulding of the Chinese vernacular, and that only in the European languages could there be found a "more superior model". (Zhao Jiabi, 1935, i., 249). Starting from 1917 Qian Xuantong began his controversial campaign for Europeanizing the Chinese vernacular by adopting Western punctuation marks, the printing and writing conventions, and the romanized transcription of Chinese

[13] It was not Hu Shi but Qiu Tingliang who first suggested replacing the literary language with the vernacular. His essay "On the vernacular as the Starting Point for Reform" (Lun Baihua Wei Weixin Zhi Ben) was published in 1898 in *Su Bao*, the well-known anti-Manchu paper, and put forward the proposal of "abolishing the literary language". His essay, like the whole newspaper, was written in the literary language.

[14] Wei Shaochang, 1982a: 134.

characters. Europeanization was avidly put into practice and brought great changes to the modern Chinese language though it did not necessarily always result in good style. Even Bing Xin, the most refined stylist of the time, acknowledged that her language was "vernacular-turned-literary" and "Chinese-turned-Western". As a result of the massive effort of the May Fourth generation of writers, the vernacular was eventually raised from its sub-cultural vulgarity to élite refinement. When vernacular fiction became *the* fiction, vernacular became the language.

Lu Xun's first short story "The Madman's Diary", the first piece of May Fourth fiction, is a powerful symbol of this transformation. The story has an introductory over-narrative which is written in the literary language, whereas the main narrative—the madman's notes—is written in the vernacular, without following any stylistic conventions. The tone of the literary-language over-narrative is sober, rational, and elegant, while that of the vernacular main narrative is chaotic and disconnected, "with many mistakes". In the literary-language part, the madman, already recovered, has returned to mainstream culture by taking up an official post, while in the vernacular part, totally isolated by society, he is deranged, his stand denied any understanding. Nevertheless, it is in the vernacular part of this first piece of modern Chinese literature that the verdict on traditional Chinese culture is proclaimed: "This is a history of thousands of man-eating years." Only those who are free from this culture are still innocent enough to see through the evil. In this way, the normality/insanity opposition is made ironical, and the vernacular has been endowed with a moral power and cultural meaning infinitely superior to that of the literary language. In a sense, "The Madman's Diary" is a manifesto for the reconstruction of the cultural hierarchy of Chinese culture.

The Fortune of Vernacular Fiction Writers

I

In traditional Chinese society, vernacular fiction writers almost never let their names be known to the public, leaving much game for scholarly hunting today. In the works of the rewriting Period, paradoxically, the name of the author was often clearly printed on the cover of most editions, no matter how drastically the novel was rewritten. Yet resounding names like Luo Guanzhong or Shi Nai'an are more likely to be figureheads than real persons. Zhou Lianggong, the early Qing scholar, completely rejected the assertion that Luo Guanzhong and Shi Nai'an could be the authors of *The Three Kingdoms* and *Water Margin*, with a well-grounded argument. "No one who wrote such books would have dared to have their names revealed. Such purported authorship is really suspicious."[15]

On the rare occasions when they were mentioned in literati works, vernacular fiction writers were mentioned with contempt. Hu Yinglin, one of those literati writers who condescended to talk about vernacular fiction, did not fail to pick on these anonymous authors, calling them "vulgar scholars in the backwoods" or "petty village pedants", as he saw their works "totally lacking any knowledge of history". He

[15]Zhou Lianggong 1958: 67.

showed a remarkable appreciation of *Water Margin*, but after praising the novel he comments on its alleged author: "I often regret that this person should have spent so much effort on such a low craft. But the skill is only a sideline gift [piancai]. Should he be asked to engage in real learning and essay-writing, he might not be able to produce anything good."[16] Zhang Xuecheng's well-known criticism of *The Three Kingdoms* was also representative of the traditional literati: "These fiction writers are not to blame since they do not possess enough knowledge, and can hardly be rid of the habit of fabricating."[17] What he was sternly against was their encroaching on the sphere of historiography by mixing fictionality with history and their confounding of the generic hierarchy.[18]

The social status of vernacular fiction writers changed a little in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Lu Xun was the first to point out that some members of the literati moved into vernacular fiction writing at that time, and he suggested that four novels should be regarded as Literati Fiction (*wenren xiaoshuo*)—Li Ruzhen's *Flowers in the Mirror*, Xia Jingqu's *Unworthy Words of a Country Man* (*Yesou Puyan*), Tu Sheng's *The Story of the Bookworm* (*Yin Shi*), and Chen Qiu's *A Tale of Yanshan* (*Yanshan Waishi*)—because these works also demonstrated their authors' erudition in terms of the literature in the élite and canonized genres.

Hsia reconsidered this list and suggested that the "scholar-novelists" should include some of the more important writers of the time, including Wu Cheng'en (author of *The Journey to the West*), Dong Yue (author of *More Chapters in the Journey to the West*), Wu Jingzi (author of *The Scholars*), and Cao Xueqin (author of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*). Actually all the major vernacular fiction writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are on the list.[19]

What these authors had in common was that they were all from well-off family backgrounds, and well-educated in the classics. They all seemed to have had an opportunity to join the power élite as they were candidates (unsuccessfully) for the *Keju* (civil service) examination, the accepted route for a government career. By some twist of fate, not only was the door to power closed to them, but their family could no longer retain their wealth. Cao Xueqin and Wu Jingzi suffered from extreme poverty after their family fortunes were exhausted, Wu Cheng'en was forced to quit his post and return to his home town, and Dong Yue went into a Buddhist monastery after the Manchu occupation. They differed from the professional vernacular fiction writers (mostly hack-writers employed by publishers), but at the same time, they also withdrew from the establishment, and were no longer bound to the mainstream culture.

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[16]Hu Yinglin 1958: ii. 18. This statement sounds like a university president today deploring a top-notch scientist turning to the writing of science fiction. This is not only a problem of evaluation but also of a distinction between "work" and "leisure", which, as I mentioned in Chap. 1 of this Part, is one of the criteria to judge the sub-cultural discourses.

[17]Huang Lin and Han Tongwen 1982: 23.

[18]There was, however, an even sterner view: "I feel sorry for the man, who made his name by writing fiction". These are lines by Cheng Jinfang. (*Mianxing Tang Ji*, ii. Quoted in *Kong Lingjing Zhongguo Xiaoshuo Shiliao* (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1982, 260).

[19]Hsia 1977: 228–321.

The first few Chinese fiction critics at the end of the Ming and beginning of the Qing—Li Zhi, Jin Shengtan, Mao Zonggang, Ye Zhou, Zhang Zhupo, and others—can be listed together with those authors. We may call them "scholar-commentators". Although among the most intelligent men of their time, none of them held any office, or had a conventionally fulfilled life. Li Zhi committed suicide in jail; Jin Shengtan was executed for joining in a protest; Zhang Zhupo died young in poverty.

Naturally, the majority of students of the classics were not able to pass the *Keju* examination, but not many had the courage to free themselves from cultural prejudice. Those authors and critics we have mentioned, who did condescend to such low genres as vernacular fiction, became the very few who dared to exile themselves from the center of the culture to its margins.[20] From the scanty biographical data we can now gather from various sources, we find that almost all of them were described as "eccentric though excellent in essay-writing" (Wu Jingzi), "with intentionally strange behavior" (Ye Zhou), etc.

None of them took to writing vernacular fiction before he gave up his effort to pass the civil service examination. For a member of the literati to go so far as writing in the sub-cultural genre was itself a deliberate offense against the cultural norms.[21]

What makes these literati writers particularly important to Chinese fiction is that when they descended the cultural ladder down to the sub-cultural rung and invaded the formerly secluded sub-cultural discursive domain, they brought with them some new qualities which the sub-cultural discursive community did not possess.

It was precisely through this process that Chinese vernacular fiction rose from the Rewriting period into the Creative period. As Hsia points out:

> The scholar-novelists would appear far less content with plain story-telling in the exercise of their role as scholars and literary men… They would take a more playful attitude towards their medium but at the same time more innovative and experimental because they were not writing to please a large public and could indulge their every creative whim.[22]

This group of strangers to vernacular fiction produced the best novels of Chinese vernacular fiction, though some of their works were unbearably pedantic. Zhao Jingsheng once commented on *The Flowers and the Moon* (*Huayue Hen*) and *The Dream of the Blue Chamber* (*Qinglou Meng*) that "it would have been probably more appropriate if those works had been written in literary language".[23] However, despite their participation, vernacular fiction remained a sub-cultural genre, something decided by the social status of the readers rather than the authors.

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[20] Robert E. Park in "Human Migration and the Marginal Man" (*American Journal of Sociology*, 33: 881–93) defines the marginal men as "those who emigrate from one culture to another". I prefer to see marginal men in a broader sense—people who try to migrate from one cultural milieu to another, but end up in between the two.

[21] Drama was an exception as only part of the dialogue was in the vernacular while all the lyrics were in literary language. We find among the playwrights leading scholars, high-ranking officials, or even princes. Among vernacular fiction writers, the one who had the highest social position was perhaps Wen Kang (author of *Ernu Yingxiong Zhuan*) who was a Manchu aristocrat.

[22] Hsia 1977: 270–1. English transl. mine.

[23] Zhao Jingshen 1980: 68.

By the late Qing, vernacular fiction writers were still socially despised. Li Boyuan was once recommended for a position by an important official, who was then impeached for recommending a vernacular fiction writer for office. Hu Jichen told us about his contemporary Wu Jianren:

> Jianren was a man much greater than a mere novelist. Yet the world. sees him only as a novelist. Alas! Jianren once wrote a biography for Li Boyuan which says, "With such a talent you should not be remembered only as a novelist. This is a great misfortune for you but a great fortune for Chinese fiction". I would deplore the misfortune of Jianren in the same words.[24]

The exaggeration of the role played by fiction did not bring about any actual improvement in the social status of the fiction writers in the late Qing.[25] It was only the abolition of the *Keju* civil service examination, the royal road to the power élite, that gave rise to the change. Aspiring scholars, not knowing where to go for a career, blundered into the field of fiction writing. Yin Bansheng wrote in 1906, the year of the abolition of the *Keju* examination system: "Ten years ago the world was one of eight-legged examination essays, today it is one of fiction writing. For those people who once devoted themselves to eight-legged essays are now trying every trick today to vie with each other, all claiming to be fiction writers."[26] There were even people who seriously suggested replacing the "Eight-Legged" examination essays with fiction, and "establishing a Civil Service Examination system on fiction writing so that the writers could have a career".[27] Zhou Guisheng, the well-known translator and colleague of Wu Jianren, even claimed that Mark Twain once won *Juren*—the title of honor for successful *Keju* candidates—in the United States. These interesting anecdotes were probably due to fiction writers' dreams when the possibility of moving out of the sub-cultural status began to be discussed.

The social composition of fiction writers of the late Qing was different from before. Instead of professional compilers or alienated scholars, there now appeared several new groups of people engaged in fiction writing. The first group consisted of activists of the political opposition: revolutionaries and reformists. It was surprising to see so many leading anti-Manchu political figures dabbling in vernacular fiction writing: Liang Qichao (author of *The Future of New China*), Chen Tianhua (author of

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[24] Wei Shaochang 1982b: 18.

[25] Li Boyuan revealed the essential sub-cultural position of the Late Qing authors and readers in the Prelude to his novel *China Today* (*Zhongguo Xianzai Ji)*: "But I am only a poor person at the bottom of society, with no power at all. Even though I have an earnest wish to rectify society and sufficient learning to put my plan into realization, my words remain empty talk as nobody will listen to me. Then why not put aside all these cares and spare myself the trouble. When, after wine-drinking, I can enjoy my leisure, and go to the melon-watcher's tent, to chat with village folks about everything on earth, and all kinds of people in history" (ZGXZJ, 17).

The title seems to indicate that this novel was meant to be a contrast to Liang Qichao's utopian novel *The Future of New China.* The emphasis on sub-culturality was also meant to be a contrast to Liang Qichao's exaggeration of the social function of fiction.

[26] "Xiaoshuo Xianping Xu", Youxi Shijie, 1, no. 1 (1906).

[27] Yiming, "Method of Reading New Fiction" (Du Xin Xiaoshuo Fa), *Xin Shijie Xiaoshuo She Bao*, no. 6.

The Lion Roars), Qiu Jin (author of some popular ballads), Huang Xiaopei (author of *Twenty Years in a Dream of Prosperity*, *Niannian Fanhua Meng*), and others. Among the members of the Southern Society (Nan She), which was the rallying point of anti-Manchu "dissident" poets and was regarded as the *de facto,* Propaganda Department for the revolutionaries, many moved to fiction writing after the 1911 Republican Revolution. In fact most leading Butterfly writers had been Southern Society members, and the People's Rights Press (*Minquan Chuban Bu*) run by the Southern Society later became one of the publishing centers of the popular entertainment Butterfly fiction.

The second group of fiction writers were members of the newly emerging comprador-technocrat class. Liu E was a notorious "traitor" in his life, because he wrote a memorandum in support of borrowing foreign funds for the Tianjin-Zhenjiang railroad and because he once held the office of Director of the German-owned Shanxi coal mines. *The Travels of Lao Can* mentioned many things which interested him—railways, Western medicine, patents, newspapers, upholstered armchairs, etc. Wu Jianren once served in the Southern Machinery Works where he was said to have invented a remote-control steamboat model.[28] Zeng Pu was originally an entrepreneur in the silk industry and in publishing, and later, after the 1911 Revolution, served in the Jiangsu Provincial Government, and was even Governor of Jiangsu for a short period. During his life he was regarded as "not a typical politician, nor a typical novelist, nor a typical scholar".[29]

The third group, and the largest one, was made up of professional writers. Never before had there been in China a group of writers of any genre of literature who could make a living by selling their fiction to magazines. It was the first time in Chinese history that fiction writing had become a profitable profession that could provide the authors with a reasonably comfortable life. One of Wu Jianren's numerous short novels *The Returning of the Soul* (*Huan Wo Linghun Ji*) was written as "advertising fiction" for a medicine-producer on payment of 300 *yuan.* That was why late Qing writers like Li Boyuan and Wu Jianren could afford to stay away from a *Keju* career and made fun of it in their works.

Thus the social composition of late Qing fiction writers was very different from that of the previous centuries: they were neither the "country pedants" nor the professional compilers of the Rewriting period, nor the impoverished failed scholars of the Creative period. The composition of writers determined some salient features of late Qing fiction which is either politically or commercially inclined. This can be seen from their attitude towards the *Keju* examination. The authors of *The Scholars* and *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, although condemning the *Keju* examination, seemed to be constantly preoccupied with the idea, as they almost paranoiacally kept talking about their contempt for the examination in their novels. In late Qing fiction, however, the *Keju* was no longer the central issue.

[28] Wei Shaochang 1982b:19.

[29] Wei Shaochang 1962b: 23.

In Chap. 4 of *A Flower in the Sinful Sea*, for instance, the protagonist, a *Zhuangyuan* (Number One Successful Candidate in the Highest Imperial Examination), discovers after meeting some top intellectuals of the time:

> Though I am a *Zhuangyuan* renowned nation-wide, I never knew that there is so much knowledge to learn about foreign countries. It looks as if the success of the *Keju* examination is insufficient. What is more important is to learn about the West and know more of current affairs, and go to serve in the Foreign Ministry. Only thus can I be called an outstanding scholar. (NHH, 12)

II

In the vernacular fiction of the Rewriting period, the personality of the writer becomes too diluted due to the repeated re-writings. The weight of the author's personality began to increase in the Creative period in some scholar-novelist novels, as Prusek points out when discussing Xia Jingqu's *The Humble Words of a Country Man* (*Yesou Puyan*) and Li Ruzhen's *Flowers in the Mirror*: "In these cases, the authors looked upon their novels as a kind of compensation for their lack of success in life, as a means of satisfying their longing for fame and immortality."[30] Yet since the narrator remained the conventional impersonal Story-teller, the personal quality can be found only through a biographical study of the author. For instance many students of Chinese fiction find that the character Du Shaoqing in *The Scholars* carries much of the personality of the author Wu Jingzi. However, if we knew nothing about Wu Jingzi's life we would not be able to detect that. The two heroes of *The Flower and the Moon* are now held as being imbued with the two sides of the personality of the author Wei Zi'an—one of the protagonists, a pitiable failure though extremely gifted, is regarded as his real self, while the other, who is fortunate enough to become a meritorious general, was the author's aspirant self. This was detected, however, only after the author's identity was revealed and his scattered biographical data gathered.

Chinese vernacular fiction was basically non-autobiographical as its narratological conventions reduced the individuality of the narrative to insignificance. Even in the late Qing, vernacular fiction writers would still just sign their pen-names, which generally were so oddly made as to attract public attention. The author of *A Flower in the Sinful Sea* was called "Sickman of the East" (Dongya Bingfu); *Strange Events* was signed "I Who Come From Foshan" (*Wo Foshan Ren*). Yet since they were not reluctant to reveal their authorship to the public, they were actually no longer so eager to remain anonymous. Their insistence on signing their pen-names on their novels was more due to a respect to the convention of vernacular fiction.[31]

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[30] Prusek 1980: 12.

[31] There is an example for the convention of anonymity in fiction works: the novel *The Mirror of Flowers* (*Pinghua Baojian*) bore the author's name as Shihan Shi, which was apparently a pseudonym. The author Chen Sen signed his real name on his *Chuanqi* play *Dream of Plum Flowers* (*Meihua Meng*). This was only natural as *Chuanqi* plays were considered a prestigious genre. What was strange was that in the preface to the novel *Mirror of Flowers*, the author, under his pseudonym, identified himself by saying, "I am also the author of the *Chuanqi* play *Dream of Plum Flowers*." So actually he did not mind whether people found out his real name. It was only because of the convention that he had to sign his novel with a pen-name.

In the May Fourth period, the situation changed completely. Authorship of fiction works could not be publicized more explicitly. By that time the author's name not only appeared below the title but within the text—it was often given to the narrator and the protagonist, as if only in this way could the writer's desire for self-exhibition be satisfied. Guo Moruo often names his protagonist "M". The protagonist in Chen Xianghe's many stories is "Mr C". Zhou Quanping writes a series of stories about a "fool in the City" whose name is "C" (initial for the Wade-Giles romanization of his name); Yu Dafu's heroes receive names such as "Yu" or "Y", or "Da", or "Yu Zhifu"; Tao Jingsun's protagonist in many of his stories is given his own name "Jingsun". Most of Liu Dajie's stories are so professedly autobiographical that the hero adopts the full name of the author. The most extreme case is perhaps Hu Shanyuan, leader of the Muse Society, whose short novel *Three Years* (*San Nian*) is a faithful record of his three-year intense romance with his wife, and the couple in it are given his and his wife's full names.

This strong, almost compulsive self-exhibition is obvious not only with the autobiographically inclined writers but is apparent with almost every author. The first-person narrator in Lu Xun's stories like "New Year Sacrifice", "In the Tavern" (Zai Jiulou Shang), and "My Old Home" (Gu Xiang) so much indulges in contemplation of the weakness in his own character that the illustrators of these stories, since Lu Xun's lifetime, have given the narrator Lu Xun's appearance. Lu Xun never objected to such a confusion in his lifetime.

As a by-product of May Fourth fiction, there were published great numbers of letters and diaries, either fictional or genuine. Indeed the two were intentionally confused. Lu Xun published his love-letters with his student girlfriend in *Letters Between Two Places* (*Liangdi Shu*), which are genuine, and a diary called "Immediate Diary" (Ma Shang Riji), which is not genuine. Feng Yuanjun's short novel *Trace of Spring* (*Chun Hen*) is composed of fifty letters written by a young woman to her fiancé, and it looks as if these are excerpts from the author's own love-letters to her fiancé Lu Kanru.

Guo Moruo's words in a letter to Zhong Baohua in 1920 can serve as witness to this compulsory self-exhibition:

> You made public my last letter to you. This was exactly what I wanted. How can I "blame you" for that? I often hate myself for not having the talent of a St Augustine, Rousseau, or Tolstoy for making a naked confession. But if I do not pour out everything from my past, my future will forever be wrapped in shadow, with no hope of being revealed. If I do not unload my feelings as early as possible, my pitiful soul will eventually be bogged down in a sea of tears, with no chance for redemption.[32]

It was definitely not the habit of the Chinese literati to examine their own guilty conscience in any genre except poetry, where such self-examination could be ambiguously covered. Some literary-language stories, like Yuan Zhen's "Yingying Zhuan" were confessional, but they are rare exceptions. In vernacular fiction, this self-exhibition was almost impossible as the impersonal Story-Teller narrator and a

[32]Three Leaves (*Sanye Ji*) 1921: 56.

conventional oral performance narrative set-up excludes any possibility of confession. Only in some of the best novels, where the narratological convention is more or less set aside, and the subjectivity of the narration has an opportunity to be diffused, as in *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, *The Travels of Lao Can*, or *Strange Events*,[33] could the personality of the writer hope to assert itself to a certain degree. It was only after the conventional narrative set-up was completely removed that confession and self-exhibition could hope to strike a major chord in Chinese fiction.

Being only a para-textual feature, a signature seems to be a matter of little real significance. Yet when we compare the situation of vernacular fiction with that of literary-language fiction, we can see that only the authors of the culturally acknowledged genres would sign their real names, or even let their names enter the text, so that their individuality could merge into the cultural order of meaning power. It is in this context that we should understand why such highly individual genres as diaries and letters never entered traditional vernacular fiction.

Indeed, in literary-language fiction, the rule that the name of the narrator can be no other than the author's name is so reliable that many literary historians have used it to reconstruct the authorship. The early Tang *chuanqi* short story "Gu Jing Ji" (The Story of the Ancient Mirror) was always anonymous. But Wang Pijiang holds that the author is Wang Du, as the name is given to the narrator. Another story "The Old Man of the East Town" (Dong Cheng Fulao Zhuan) had always had the name of the author as Chen Hong. Yet the narrator in the story is named Chen Hongzu, and Wang Pijiang insists that the author's name should be changed accordingly.[34]

The author of vernacular fiction could never hope to achieve this kind of self-confidence, not even by the end of the late Qing. Liu E's attitude toward his own great novel *The Travels of Lao Can* is quite interesting. According to his son, he was often very depressed that his pastime writing won him fame, and, therefore, reluctant to let the public know that he was the author.[35] Yet at the end of every chapter of the novel there is attached a "Comment by Liu E". If it was his strong intention to hide his name, he did not have to reveal it in the comments. Actually the type of signature and accrediting was decided by the generic requirements. The author of vernacular fiction should sign a pseudonym as it was a sub-cultural discourse, while the author of comments should sign his real name, just as the official historians did when commenting on historical events, or commentator-critics did in commenting on fiction.

That is why the signature of the May Fourth fiction is a powerful indication of the fundamental change of the cultural status of Chinese fiction. May Fourth writers

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[33] Few have noticed the autobiographical nature of *Strange Events*. Wu Xiaoru checked the first edition of the novel (Shanghai: Guangzhi Shuju 1907), and found printed on that edn. many marginal notes, obviously written by the author himself. In Chap. 108, there is a note: "The discovery of the brother in the last chapter is the happiest thing in the author's life. An artist painted a picture for this occasion… The funeral in this chapter is the most rueful thing in the author's life." (Wu Xiaoru 1982: 163–5).

[34] Wang Pijiang 1958: 116.

[35] Liu Dashen, "Guanyu Lao Can Youji", in *Lao Can Youji* (Taipei: Lianjing Chubanshe, 1976), 251.

were no longer on the margins of the society: they definitely belonged to the élite, and soon became the core of the new generation of intellectuals. On the other hand, they were still deviants from the cultural norms. One thing they had in common was a sense of a lack of belonging. A great number of them were returnees from abroad. As Zheng Boqi—himself a returnee author—tells us: "They lived abroad for a long time, and often had a strong nostalgia for the Fatherland. Nevertheless, the many disappointments they received at home gave them a feeling of emptiness. The more they longed for home when abroad, the more they feel angry once they are home."[36] And he insisted that works by these authors "had a strong resemblance to immigrants' literature" (*yimin wenxue*). They were, indeed, marginal people in their society.

This coincides with the description Lu Xun gave to another group of authors—the young intellectuals in Beijing or Shanghai who came from provincial towns. Both the authors and their protagonists in May Fourth fiction were constantly and nervously on the move from one place to another. As Yu Dafu confessed in one letter, "Hermits enjoy a better name, but a wandering life is more to my taste".[37] These estranged young intellectuals formed an estranged sector of the élite, whose attachment the culture failed to win.

Truths of reality, can never be exhausted. There are as many truths as there are perspectives, and the greater the number of perspectives applied, the richer does human culture become. Most fundamentally, I think this is why we should strive for pluralism in literature as in other arenas of intellectual and artistic endeavor.

Let us hope that Chinese writers writing in a modernist or post-modernist vein will consider changes in the form of literature as a means to an end, i.e., to reach aspects of reality which have previously been terra incognita. Gao Xingjian says that his aim in creating a new modern Chinese Language is to be able to express his own perceptions and feelings.(xiii) To me his recent novel *Lingshan* (The spiritual mountain) stands out as a successful example of a literary experiment with language and form which illuminates cultural and social realities that we have not known before.(xiv) I think we have good reason to expect that the literary experiments that now preoccupy the minds of some of China's most talented writers of poetry and fiction will not only provide aesthetic enjoyment in a narrow sense, but will also widen our horizons and deepen our insight into the complexities of the human condition.

Notes

(i) Gao Xingjian, "Wenxue yu Xuanxue: Guanyu 'Lingshan'" (Literature and Mysterious Learning: on "The Spiritual Mountain"), in *Jintian* 3 (1992), pp. 203–215.
(ii) Ibid.
(iii) Ibid.

[36] Zhao Jiabi, 1935: Volume 3 of Fiction, p. xii.
[37] Yu Dafu 1927: 207–8.

(iv) Zhao Yiheng, "Xinchao Wenxue: Wenhua Zhuanxingqi de Chun Wenxue" (New Wave Literature: the Pure Literature of A Transformational Period), in *Jintian* 1 (1991), pp. 83–92.

(v) Liu Zaifu's article "Lun Wenxue de Zhutixing" (On the Subjective Nature of Literature) was of course a landmark in this context. This article was originally published in *Wenxue Pinglun* 6 (1985), and 1 (1986).

(vi) Cf. Anthony Giddens, ed., *Positivism and Sociology* (London: Heinemann, 1974).

(vii) See Liu Xiaobo, *Shenmei Yu Ren de Ziyou* (Aesthetics and Human Freedom, Beijing: Beijing Shifandaxue Press, 1988).

(viii) For example, it figures prominently in the first chapters of the *Wenxin Diaolong*. In the Neo-Confucian discourse we meet with Zhou Dunyi's formula *Wen Yi Zai Dao* (Literature Carries *dao*) as well as with the alternative *Wen Yi Guan Dao* (Literature Links Up with *Dao*) in the Neo-Confucian discourse; see Richard John Lynn, "Chu Hsi as Literary Theorist and Critic," in Wing-tsit Chan, ed., *Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), pp. 337–354.

(ix) Consider for example, the short stories of Yu Dafu.

(x) *Xin qingnian* 5:1 (15 July 1918).

(xi) "The Nobel Lecture, 1980," *The New York Review of Books* 28:3 (1981).

(xii) Ibid.

(xiii) Gao Xingjian. Gp. cit.

(xiv) This novel was published in 1991 by the Lianjing Chuban Shiye Gongsi in Taipei.

Chapter 10
The Second Tide: Chinese Influence on American Poetry Today

The first tide of interest in Chinese classical poetry came upon modem American poetry at its very inception—the American Poetry Renaissance—when American poets unexpectedly "discovered" the treasure of Chinese poetry, and found that their own movement was an American reincarnation of the Chinese spirit. Indeed we can hardly find a major poet at the time untouched by this "spiritual invasion from China."[1]

The tide reached its peak in 1922, and then gradually subsided. From that time on till 1950s, the conservative Eliot-New Criticism dominance was so oppressively stable that interest in Chinese poetry was confined to a few individual poets. It was only after the late 1950s when the storm of the Beat Generation and other anti-academic poetry movements swept the American poetry scene that the tide of interest in Chinese poetry rose the second time.

Unlike the first one, the second tide has been less sensational but more enduring. Today, after almost three decades, there is no sign of the ebbing. The contemporary Open Verse trend has Ezra Pound as its godfather, and William Carlos Williams and Kenneth Rexroth as its two patrons on the two coasts. It is by no means coincidental that all the three were enthusiastic about Chinese poetry. Here, perhaps, I have to say a few words about Williams, relationship to Chinese poetry, since the enthusiasm of the other two for Chinese poetry is already well documented. Indeed Williams insistently refused to acknowledge any foreign influence, for he wanted to emphasize his credo of the "American idioms." Not until his last years did he reveal his interest in Chinese poetry, his surprisingly passionate praise in his review of Rexroth's translation of *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese* (1956) as "poetry in true American idioms," and his own translations of Chinese poetry[2] as well, attested to it.

Had this long-hidden interest anything to do with his old friend and old enemy Ezra Pound? He quarreled with Pound over the latter's cosmopolitanism which, he thought, was not compatible with his "Americanism", So when I found in his translation a deliberately mistranslated line, I could not help but smile: the last line of Li Yi's famous poem should be "It tasted so different at heart." Williams, however, made it into four lines:

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Y. Zhao, *The River Fans Out*, China Academic Library,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6_10

Involute,
Entangled,
The feeling of departure
Clings like a wet leaf to my heart.

This is too clear an echo of Ezra Pound's poem "Liu Che":

A wet leaf that clings to the threshold.

This celebrated clinging leaf of Pound's had been resurrected in many American poems, especially around 1920.[3] Since Williams' version is not a translation at all (while the rest of his group of Chinese poems are fairly faithfully translated), we can only see this as a unadmitted tribute to Ezra Pound's life long persistence in introducing Chinese poetry.

Whereas Pound's lyrical rendition of Li Bai's "The River Merchant's Wife" moved many readers in 1914, the second tide was heralded by Conrad Aiken' s long lyric *Letters from Li Po*, With this poem, the veteran poet, in the opinion of many critics, ascended to another zenith of his long literary career. Aiken himself acknowledged that many lines and episodes in the poem were inspired by Li Bai:

Fanfare of northwest wind, a bluejay wind
announces autumn, and the equinox
rolls back blue bays to a for afternoon.
Somewhere beyond the gorge Li Bai is gone,
looking for friendship or an old love's sleeve
or writing letters to his children lost,
and to his children's children, and to us.

The lyric spirit "did not stop with us, but begins with us," as the American poet considers himself child of this master of Chinese poetry.

Many of the "Chinese" pieces Kenneth Rexroth produced are somewhat "too Chinese"—with Chinese images in a typical Chinese landscape, signed with his Chinese pen-name and printed together with his Chinese translations. But his own poems are also so imbued with the tinge of sadness of the Chinese lyric that we can feel in them the pulsation of the irresistible Chinese poetic spirit. Leaving aside many of his poems citing the Chinese masters, one of his endearingly moving poems that tells how he drives through the town, where the lover of his young days once lived, ends in this way:

I drive down by the river
And watch a boy fishing from the bridge
In the clear water amongst
Falling and floating leaves
And then I drive West into the smokey sunset.
(*Red Maple Leaves*)

Readers of "Chinese Departure Poems" (the name was created by Ezra Pound) can feel the typical Chinese reconciliatory sentiment of acceptance of time as irretrievable. Rexroth once praised. Witter Bynner's translation of Yuan Zhen's elegy for his deceased wife as "one of the dozen best modem American poems, and surely Bynner's best poem". This strange praise is indeed heart-felt admiration. And when he was mourning over the death of his wife, he too produced some of his own best poems.

Of all the living poets who have succeeded in conveying complex emotions after the Chinese models, the most successful is perhaps Carolyn Kizer, who won the 1985 Pulitzer Prize with her recent collection Yin, the poems in which are a unique amalgamation of the Chinese lyrical vein and contemporary feminist spirit. Oriental love poems, in the Western mind, are associated with Rubaiyat sentimentalism and hedonism. Yet in Kizer's *Imitations of Chinese Poems* the helplessness of love is handled with a subtly controlled tragic tone, which is both true to the aesthetic attitude of the ancient Chinese and expressive of the mentality of modem American women.

It is natural for American poets who are interested in Chinese poetry to go to what lies behind the Chinese poetic magic. Small wonder that *Zen* and *Tao* enthusiasts form the most visible group among contemporary American "China" poets.

In Chinese poetics, the competition between Taoism and Zen Buddhism and their final convergence made them similar to each other in many aspects, but difficult for American poets to separate. Such a distinction is perhaps unnecessary so far as American poetry is concerned.

American poets began to feel the importance of Taoism in Chinese poetry by the end of the Poetry Renaissance. Witter Bynner in his 1922 long essays on the Tao in poetry expressed his admiration for Wang Wei's answer to the most complicated question of the world:

> You ask about the cause of failure or fortune,
> Far on the lake the fisherman's singing.

No answer should be given to these questions, since they can not be answered at all. In this way, the meaningless but natural utterance—the fisherman's singing—becomes most meaningful. The whole world exists in its undifferentiatedness.

Taoism may well serve as a salve for modem poets who are weary of the many presumptuous positive scientific explanations of post-industrialized civilization. Most of these answers, after all, are hostile to a poetic understanding of the world. In Umberto Eco's words, modem "scientific" cultures, being too "grammar-oriented" (that is, governed by a dearly stipulated metalingual system for social activity), need to let the life of individuals be more "text-oriented," that is, to allow a certain ambiguity in interpretation.[4] Taoism serves to facilitate this precious blurring of the coding.

Jackson Mac Low, who belongs to the experimentalist school of artists headed by the musician John Cage, ends one of his poems with these lines:

> ephemeral
> shun explanation, living for
> refuse explanation, living I actions
> consent explanation.
> (*Self-Reliance*)

This may be an expansion of the teaching of *Daode Jing*, but it might be more Taoistic than the Taoist Scripture, because though he distrusted language, the purported author Lao Zi wrote in elegant Chinese, while Mac Low confounds English when he refuses the possibility of an explanation in language.

The ancient Chinese divinatory book *Yi Jing* is not a Taoist scripture as other schools of philosophers also tried to use it, but it won its most mystical explanation in the hands of the Taoists. I am surprised to find the number of American poets who are fascinated with this mysterious book. In Sandra Prewitt Edelman's *Emblems from the I Ching*, every poem has an *Yi Jing* hexagram as its title. Actually the poems are mostly about love, but the mystical aura they receive from the Yi Jing makes the perplexity of the love relationship more frustratingly impenetratable.

The most devoted *Yi Jing* worshipper among today's American poets is probably Frederick Morgan, founder of *The Hudson Review*. Morgan worked as a successful editor till one morning in his late forties, he woke up and, with the help of *Yi Jing* discovered a mature poet in himself. In 1970 he published his first collection *A Book of Change*. The title is a slight variation of *Yi Jing* (Book of Changes). Since then he has published seven collections of poetry, and the Chinese spirit has been consistent in them all.

> Patient things wait in nature
> having undertaken to be only what they are.
> Crystal bedded in gneiss,
> coral under sea,
> robin eggs blue in the nest…
> (*In Silence*)

In his poems, then, nature is impregnated with its own answers which are "only what they are." Such a doctrine may serve for any cause against the human manoeuvring of nature, including human nature.

When the American New Surrealists try to drag in some kind of mystical philosophy to justify their revised edition of surrealism, they find Taoism more suitable than any other. I do not know whether the American poets who have been grouped by critics under the loose name New Surrealism would agree with Robert Bly, but this leader of the New Surrealists told me in 1983 in a San Francisco interview that Tao is the savior of American poetry:

> The American poetry sees in Tao the direction which it should have taken long ago—to reach a balance of Yin and Yang. It is shame that the academician poets are still following

> the British tradition, which is the language of the colonialists, not to be used by us, the colonialized. Those poems are Yang poems written by Yang poets in a solely Yang vein under a square roof. Yin reaches deeply into the subconscious and comes out with deep images. We are taking up the betrayed cause of the Imagists.[5]

Here the first tide of Chinese interest is being evoked to reinforce the second tide, and the theme is still how Chinese poetics can fuel true American poetics. When asked for an example to illustrate what he meant by Yin-Yang balanced Taoist poetry, Robert Bly strongly recommended the poem "Lying in a Ham-mock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island Minnesota" by his deceased friend James Wright:

> Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly,
> Asleep on the black trunk,
> Blowing like a leaf in green shadow.
> Down the ravine behind the empty house,
> The cowbells follow one another Into the distances of the afternoon.
> To my right,
> In a field of sunlight between two pines,
> The droppings of last year's horses,
> I lean back, as the evening darkens and comes on.
> A chicken hawk floats over, looking for home.
> I have wasted my life.

In a conscientious meditation on the phenomenal world, some enlightenment found in the depths of subconsciousness emerges to assume the appearance of the phenomena. In this respect, the poem is truly Taoistic.

But I would try to convince Bly that some American poets younger than his generation could also produce truly Taoistic poems. Charles Wright, the

South Carolina professor in his collection China Trace provided some good poems reaching toward this ideal:

> Divested everything,
> A downfall of light in the pine woods moves in the rush,
> Gold leaf through the undergrowth, and come back As another name, water
> Pooled in black leaves and holding me there, to be
> Released as a glint, as a flash, as a spark…
> (*April*)

The poet is seeking an ecstatic transformation in something beyond human experience. Charles Wright wrote to me saying that his interest in Chinese poetry made all the poems in China Trace a search for the one small spot of stillness and calm one longs for, the order in one's life and thought that is *inherent in nature everywhere.*[6]

Is this spot of stillness, the center of silence, which is inherent in nature, to be found only in the subconscious? If so, how can it be brought out in words? This is the inherent paradox of Tao. Since naming itself destroys the truth which is unnameable, then perhaps the best way is to name without a regular naming. That is just what

Jackson Mac Low does when he writes poems by picking words randomly from *Yi Jing*—an English translation I guess. Accidental words are charged with what is hidden in the subconscious, because the composition of the poems is not tainted with any conscious activity of the mind. This method, which Mac Low and his musician friends call the "randomizing technique" is, of course, nothing new, only their predecessors the Dadaists did not trust to one particular book to cooperate with their subconscious.

Zen, the most important sinicized form of Buddhism, exists in America now more or less as an exotic religion. But it came to America in the wake of Chinese poetry, as an explanation of its magic power. Through earnest meditation, *Zen* believers try to find a solution to the destructive opposition between nature and human mind, between the sensual and the transcendental. By starting from the physical, poetry can attain something which, though spiritual, is physical in its expression. That is why William's credo for American poetry "No idea but things" is truly Chinese, because "things transcend themselves."

I have not proof that Williams ever took to *Zen*, but Rexroth insisted that Williams was not fully understood by the American critics till *Zen* came to America. The Williamsian world so resembles the world that Chinese poetry creates that there must be a common aesthetic canon behind them. Once at a poetry gathering I recited two poems, one by Williams and the other by Wang Wei, and asked the audience to guess which was by whom. Most raised their hands for the following poem as by the Tang Chinese poet:

> Silence
> Under a low sky—
> this quiet morning
> of red and
> yellow leaves—
> A bird disturbs
> no more than one twig
> of the golden leaved
> peach tree.
> This is by Williams. I knew because I copied it and marked it before I forgot.

There is another difference between the Chinese interest today and the one early this century: this time there has arisen an important intermediary—the Chinese-American poets. During the ten years of the American Poetry Renaissance, there were almost no Chinese poets or translators writing in English. The earliest poetry collection written by a Chinese in English is Pagoda Poems by a Chinese student Moon Kwan in Los Angeles in 1921, whose poems, at best, are only trial ones. The earliest Chinese translator of Chinese poetry into English was Jiang Tinggan (Chiang Ting-kan), a Chinese navy officer whose English was peculiarly obsolete. Neither of them was Chinese-American.

Chinatown at that time was an exotic ghetto which attracted several American poets with its alien atmosphere and strange persons. The Chinatown poems produced

by Vachel Lindsay (*The Chinese Nightingale*, 1917) and Edgar Lee Masters (*Lichee Nuts*, 1930) can hardly be said to be influenced by genuine Chinese culture at all.

The image of Chinese Americans as restaurant owners and laundrymen (as in, say, some of Williams's poems) is completely out-of-date now. Though Chinese Americans, now mostly well-educated, still work as "technical coolies," there are now an increasing number of Chinese-American artists and poets taking an active part in American cultural life. Chinese-American poetry as a sociocultural effort did not emerge till the early 1970s. Towards the end of this decade, some representative Chinese-American poets began to put out solo publications, and Chinese-American poetry started to take shape.

One central issue among Chinese-American poets is whether they should be poets first, or Chinese Americans first. For many Chinese-American poets, their Chinatown experience is still their unforgettable past, and their immediate history. The San Francisco poets Nellie Wong, Jenny Lim, Merle Woo (all of them belonging to the former "Unbound Feet Six" group) and the New York poets around the Baseman Workshop and the magazine are all militant feminists and social workers in Chinatown, which forms the social background of most of their poems. The Seattle based Chinese-American poets—Alan Lau, Shawn Wang and some fiction writers and playwrights are similarly concerned with the history of bitterness of Chinese-American life. In Hawaii, there is another group of poets around the magazine *The Bamboo Ridge*. The social criticism and voice of protest against white dominance in American culture is an important feature in their works,but their poetry, ethnically centered, shows an apparent discontinuity from the Chinese poetic tradition.

These poets view this tradition with suspicion when they are fighting for equal rights, as they are eager to change the "stereotyped" image of the Chinese. But most Chinese-American poets understand that they cannot afford to ignore the Chinese poetic tradition which is a constant call to the descendants of Chinese, even if now they are dispersed in different lands and speaking different tongues.

Diana Chang, New York suburban poet, is also a painter. With the depletion of normal balance, with the syncopated rhythm in her sentence structure, her language seems to proceed by itself without referring to the world of objects. She told me that she has been chasing painstakingly in her poems "the concise minimalism which she finds both in Matisse and in Chinese literati brush paintings."[7] This is a cause to which it is worth devoting a lifetime's effort.

John Yau, an art critic, is closely associated with the New York school of contemporary American poets, and has a strong inclination towards surreal-ism His works are full of dream-like images where corpse and mirror as two leitmotifs respectively symbolize death and fantasy. The intensity of modern man's experience squeezes a horror from everything—from the late night movies to the coffin factories:

> Some fish we peel back, leaving only bones. Other devour us, leaving only stories.
> (*Carp and Goldfish*)

John Yau is fond of teasing readers with his playful handling of language because he is sure that playfulness itself is the result of the all-permeating fantasy of life. In his poetic works we see the fruit of the integration of Chinese and American sensibilities.

Once a student of Chinese literature at Berkeley but now teaching in New Mexico, Arthur Sze is perhaps the only Chinese-American poet who also translates Chinese poetry. He has already published five collections of poems which draw heavily from the Chinese. His poems are reminiscent of Chinese poetry in the way they create an atmosphere which lets the readers feel that the poetic world lies mystically hidden between what is said and what is not said.

Among the Chinese-American poets, the Oakland-based poet Carolyn Lau is possibly the only one who is more interested in Chinese philosophy than Chinese poetry. The peculiarity of her difficult poetic language in addition to the heavy allusions makes her poems not easy to understand at a first reading. Yet we find that what lies at the center of the maze of language are the senses and feelings of an American woman rather than of the Chinese sages:

> Wife or not, I turn to look
> at what was Right before my breath.
> The white horse yields a world
> of words defying music's eyes
> I cannot, can
> not stop desire's choice to pleasure in my worth.
> The birds instruct me in the art
> to follow senses known at birth.
> (*A Footnote to the Dispute Among Confucius's Disciples*)

The allusion, of course, is to the dispute between the Mengzi school and the Sunzi school about the nature of human being. But Carolyn Lau brushes aside both arguments, and tries in her own way to assert the right of the human being to choose "senses known at birth," that is, pleasure, an assertion typical of a modem American woman. Some of her lines in her recently published collection *Wode Shuofa* (*My Way of Speaking*) are like riddles, but occasionally they are pleasantly chewy:

> If a line must be balanced to catch fish,
> I will be the line because I am the fish.
> (*Mencius Fulfilled by Escher*)

Mengzi's well-known proposition of "moral extension" became the key to knowing the metamorphosing world of modem artists, and when the poet identifies herself as part of this endless metamorphosis, the poetic world is now in constant flux.

Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, a choreographer by profession, turns her artistic experience into deftly drawn sketches with short graceful strokes:

> Friday, you'll be here. Confluence
> across the delta again. A pattern fans out
> on the sand. When at lowest tide it is sunset
> I can wade across, holding my shoes.
> (*The Intention of Two Rivers*)

Is this an eagerness to see the confluence of the two cultural traditions, with each retaining its own intention?

Space does not allow me to discuss such accomplished Chinese-American poets such as Alex Kuo of Idaho, Li-young Lee of Chicago, Marulyn Chin of San Francisco, and many others. What is of more concern to our discussion here is how Chinese-American poets serve as the medium between Chinese poetry and American poetry. We see that they are doing well in this respect, not because most Chinese-American poets are more or less bilingual, but be-cause they take pride in their cultural heritage, and endeavor to incorporate this inherited relationship with Chinese culture in their works. In fact many of them have formed a close association with "mainstream" American poetry just because of their link with Chinese poetry. In recent years the names of major Chinese-American poets have begun to appear together with major con-temporary American poets on the publication lists of prestigious publishers or on the poetry reading posters on campuses. Chinese-American poetry is definitely moving out of the limited world of "ethnic literature."[8]

A large number of the American poets have been fascinated by the characteristic serenity and calmness of Chinese landscape poetry and have tried to recapture the charm of the quiet nostalgia in their own works.

Kenneth O'Hanson, a Northwestern poet, cherishes a deep love for the beauty of the West Lake in Hangzhou (though he told me that he had never been there) and his prize-winning first collection *The Distance Anywhere* (1966) offers us some beautiful adaptations of Lin Pu the Song poet.

The environmentalist movement, still very active two decades after its emergence, is the central concern behind these seemingly simple quietest poems. Since an ideal harmony and symbiosis between man and nature is best embodied in Chinese landscape poetry, almost all of the contemporary American poets who are involved in the environmentalist movement—Gary Snyder, James Wright, Lew Welch, Robert Bly, Philip Whalen, Donald Hall, John Haines, and Sam Hammil, among others—are without exception interested in Chinese poetry. It is not accidental that all these poets spent many years in self-exile, as monks, hermits or farmers, following the examples many centuries ago of Tao Qian, Han Shan, Lin Pu, and Wang Wei.

The lines by Willis Barnstone, an Indiana University professor, on Wang Wei, then, sound like a wakening shout in the ear of contemporary society:

> …Wang Wei also
> was struck in life, and from his hermitage
> he tells a friend to walk the idle hills
> alone, to swallow failure like the aging
> year, to dream (what else is there) of snow.
> (*Snow*)

Robert Bly caught the true spirit of Chinese quietism after he studied Tao Qian's poems and mingled his translations of Tao Qian with his own poems in his 1972 collection Jumping out of Bed. The satisfying peacefulness from ancient China passes into poems like this one:

In a Train
There has been a light snow.
Dark car tracks move in and out of the darkness.
I stare at the train windows, marked with soft dust.
I have awakened at Missoula, Montana, utterly happy.

Few poems could be simpler, but fewer poems could hope to be more imbued with the typical Chinese happiness with the quietude of uncontaminated nature. Most illustrative of this situation is the change of attitude of Gary Snyder, the Zen-inspired Dharma Bum, the archetypal hero of American counter-culture. This is no place to discuss the full spectrum of Chinese influence on Snyder, and in any case his early career has been well documented and studied. But few critics have paid sufficient attention to his shift of emphasis on the different aspects of Chinese poetics and philosophy. As a devoted student of *Zen* for almost twenty years, Snyder benefited mainly from quietism as the supporting principle of *Zen.* His identification with Han Shan and Wang Wei was justified by his own eagerness to become, like Han Shan, "A man of solitude who could take off by himself and live purely and true to himself."

But change gradually set in when he became more involved in the environmentalist movement. In the early 1970's when Richard Howard compiled *Preferences*, Snyder was one of the American poets who were asked to choose one of his own poems and cite a masterpiece as its model. Snyder chose this short poem from his Pulitzer-wining collection *The Turtle Island*:

Pine Tree Tops
in the blue night
frost haze, the sky glows
with the moon
pine tree tops bend snow-blue, fade
into sky, frost, starlight,
the creak of boots,
rabbit tracks, deer tracks,
what do we know.

And he cited a poem by Su Shi as his model:

Spring Night
Spring night—one hour worth a thousand coins,
Clear scent of flowers, shadowy moon.
Songs and flutes upstairs—threads of sound:
In the garden, a swing, where night is deep and still.

The method of both poems, Howard comments, is "a mystery of silence," because, as he feels, "in such a poetry, the silence must count for a great deal more—in fact the silence does all the counting."

But this is not all. At first glance, these two poems are very different. Snyder seems to be the observation by a lonely hunter, an Indian perhaps, whose whole life

is immersed in nature. But Su Shi's poem is on the contrast of the life of officialdom and the enjoyable solitude where the only reminder of the social life is the swing. What then is common between the two? After twenty years of obsession with *Zen* philosophy, Gary Snyder has been returning to a more active attitude towards life and a more committed poetics in order to serve the environmentalist cause better. He pointed out this change to me in unequivocal terms:

> I am now reading the Song poets, because I feel they are more contemporary with us. They live with the same problems we have now—an age that was refined, highly civilized, and a money economy. Nevertheless it was also the beginning of an ecological destruction in central China. So these poets are more Confucianist-inclined than their forerunners and generally more involved in politics—Lu You, Su Shi, Mei Yaochen, and many others. We can see a certain consciousness of the situation in their poetry.[9]

When I asked what ideological-poetical message he received from his reading of Song poetry, he declared frankly: "I am now a Confucianist-Buddhist-Taoist." This was the requirement of society as he said in a previous interview, "The danger and hope politically is that Western civilization has reached the end of its ecological rope. Right now is the potential for the growth of a real people's consciousness."[10] So this has been his path from Han Shan to Su Shi. Gary Snyder, following Ezra Pound is moving toward a far more socially-committed eclecticism in the true tradition of Chinese men of letters.

There have been times when some poems by American poets in imitation of the Chinese justify Richard Wilbur's complaint that "it is really difficult for me to tell the charmingly simple from the too damned simple."[11] Classical Chinese poetry, at least its better pieces, is simple only in appearance, and only at first reading. "Only when you look back," said Conrad Aiken, "could you understand how exquisitely selective the (Chinese) poet was." Only when we look back, can we see the ideological message of the American interest in Chinese poetry hidden under the disguise of simplicity. Against the back-ground of a post-industrial society, and human experience under the threat of computerization, environmental pollution, and the mechanization of human nature, the message of protest behind the quietism is not to be ignored. This is precisely the reason why the second tide of American interest in Chinese poetry has been at a high point for almost three decades. So long as this threat of human alienation in a technically over-sophisticated society continues, Chinese poetry will continue to play its role as one of the possible saviors for a poetry struggling to recover the dignity of human life in an increasingly dehumanized world.

Chinese poetry which was first accepted by contemporary American poetry as a remote model for counter-culture, is now playing a far more complex role. Now that the *Zen* and *Tao* messages have acquired more diversified interpretations, now that the lyrical traits of Chinese poetry are transformed to answer the feminist call, when Chinese-American poets are discovering their artistic identity with the help of Chinese poetry, and especially now that the counter-cultural current in American poetry is taking a more socially-committed stand towards the frustrating problems of post-industrial society (though this process is more visible in Europe with environmentalist groups beginning to engage in politics), at such a moment, we find that

Chinese poetry and poetics still serve effectively as a source of revelation for many American poets.

Notes

1. Conrad Aiken, "Sunt Rerum Lacrimae," *Scepticism* (New York: A. A. Knoft, 1919) 226.
2. "Cassia Tree—Translations from the Chinese in Collaboration with David Rafael Wang," New Directions 19 (1966) 211–231.
3. Some examples:

   > One leaf, blood-bright, stains quiet
   > Like a cry.
   > (Barbett Deutsch: *Lines Written in Time of Peace*)
   >
   > In my heart is the sorrow
   > Of years like red leaves buried in the snow.
   > (John Gould Fletcher: *Despair*)

   And also Djuna Bames' *The Dead Favourite of Liu Che*. I suspect that Archibald Macleish borrowed from Pound in his well-known *Ars Poetica*:

   > For all the history of grief
   > An empty doorway and a maple leaf.

4. For Umberto Eco's expansion of this pair of terms originally suggested by Jurij Lotman, see his *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976) 58–60.
5. My interview with Robert Bly, January 1983, San Francisco. Chinese translation in *Waiguo Wenxue Cankao Ziliao*, March 1983, 14.
6. Charles Wright's letter to me dated September 15, 1982.
7. Diana Chang's letter to me dated January 18, 1986.
8. In an effort to sum up the achievements made by Chinese American poets in the last two decades, Prof. Ling-chi Wang and I have compiled *An Anthology of Chinese American Poetry* which is being published by University of Washington Press. Its Chinese translation will be published by Shanghai Literature and Art Press.
9. My interview with Gary Snyder, February 4, 1982, San Diego. Chinese translation of the interview in *Waiguo Wenxue Cankao Ziliao*, March 1983, 12.
10. Gary Snyder, *The Real Work: Interviews and Talks 1964–1979* (New York: New Directions, 1980) 108.
11. Richard Wilbur, Preface to Volume II of *Works of Witter Bynner*, ed. James Kraft (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1979) xi.

Part III
Recent Chinese Literature

Chapter 11
The Rise of Metafiction in China

Though it would be almost impossible to trace who first applied the term "Avant-Garde fiction" (Xianfeng Xiaoshuo 先锋小说) to a recent trend in Chinese fiction since 1985, it is an appropriate name in many respects. All the previous schools of fiction in modern China—Wound fiction (Shanghen Xiaoshuo 伤痕小说), Reform fiction (Gaige Xiaoshuo 改革小说), Re-thinking fiction (Fansi Xiaowen 反思小说), or Roots-Seeking fiction (Xungen Xiaoshuo 寻根小说)—received their names after their respective subject matters. The naming of Avant-Garde fiction itself seems to indicate that Chinese fiction has grown out of its thematic age to enter a new phase of life beyond themes.

The earliest authors of Chinese Avant-Garde fiction—Can Xue (残雪), Ma Yuan (马原), Hong Feng (洪峰), Zhaxi Dawa (扎西达娃), Mo Yan (莫言) and others—are all based in remote areas far from the centres of modern Chinese civilization. This led some critics to the conclusion that literary modernity was at odds with modern urbanized culture.[1] Hardly had such an argument been put forward when, towards the end of 1987, there appeared a new group of Avant-Garde writers Su Tong (苏童) with *The Escape of 1934* (*1934 Nian de Tao Wang*一九三四年的逃亡),[2] Sun Ganlu (孙甘露) with *The Letter from the Postman* (信使之函),[3] Ge Fei (格非) with *The Lost Boat* (迷舟)[4] and Yu Hua (余华) with *One Kind of Reality* (Xianshi Yizhong 现实一种)[5]—all of them based in the Yangtze Delta, the most prosperous area of modern China. This would suggest, at least, that Chinese Avant-Gardism is not entirely dependent on economic-geographical conditions.

Avant-Gardism, in its literal sense, is a temporal phenomenon. People tend to think that it must sooner or later be replaced by something newer, and thus be reduced the conventional rear-garde. If, however, we look at European avant-garde works of the early twentieth century, we see that most of them still retain their Avant-Gardist flavour, hardly dulled by time. Avant-Garde fiction would thus seem to be a cultural distinction, like popular literature. Most popular literature of a century ago still reads as popular literature today, though it is hard to predict whether in four or five centuries, time they will have a change of fortune, like some of the Chinese vernacular novels of many centuries ago.

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Y. Zhao, *The River Fans Out*, China Academic Library,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6_11

Recent Chinese Avant-Garde fiction is the first avant-garde school in the history of modern Chinese literature. From May Fourth literature (五四文学) to the New Waves in literature (新潮文学), almost the whole of modern Chinese fiction has been, generally speaking, interpretative in nature,[6] using all available means to persuade the reader to favour the "correct" interpretation. A complicit sharing of codes is the desired goal common to all these schools, though the degree of exertion of interpretative guidance differs with various periods and groups. There is a conspicuous interpretative overkill in the post-Yan'an Literature of the 1940s and the so-called Sing-Praise Literature (*Songge Wenxue* 颂歌文学) of the 1950s and 1960s, which categorically deny the reader any right to allow his reading to deviate from the expected interpretation. Of course, a sufficiently critical reader/critic may still reach beyond the text to find the cultural control behind it, but such interrogatory critical readings are indeed deviant readings. Most readers/critics of these texts are not expected to challenge the interpretative guidance provided by the text. For over half a century, any work of fiction that slackened the interpretative control and thus allowed deviant readings was subjected to political criticism even if its ideological stand was explicitly "correct". Some of the best of May Fourth fiction of 1917-27 allows a relatively free interpretation, though the desired reading remains well-marked.

What the recent Chinese Avant-Garde writers have been producing is a fiction which, by refraining from interpretative prompting, deliberately obliterates its intentional context and shuns interpretative guidance. Any reading is then both a desired reading and a deviant reading. Whereas for other texts a deviant interpretation is obtainable only after much critical manoeuvring, for Avant-Garde fiction, deviant readings seem to be the only possible readings. Robert Scholes once described this hesitation of contemporary fiction to provide interpretative guidance as a "masturbatory reveling in self-scrutiny", and warns:

> Readers need imaginative help from writers. If all they get are muffled cries of "Go'way, I got my own problems", they will indeed go away.[7]

It may be true that most readers want the narrator to provide interpretative directions, but readers of metafiction should not. If most of them really turn their backs on Avant-Garde fiction (as readers in most countries have done), this is the price Avant-Gardists are ready to pay.

In its refusal to guide the reader to an interpretation, Chinese Avant-Garde fiction reveals strong metafictional tendencies. Without going unnecessarily deeply into the frustratingly difficult problem of defining the prefix "meta-" in its modern usage, metafiction can be simply described as "fiction about fiction" [8] or, to use Scholes's derogatory term for it, as the obsession with "self-scrutiny",

In any fictional text there are bound to be some traces which reveal its narratorial control and thus betray its fictional nature. Metafiction in its general sense, therefore, is omnipresent in any kind of fiction. A narrative instance is bound to be an action across levels, a from-above creation of the narrated world, and traces of this creation are bound to show up here and there in the course of the narrative, exposing the narrated world as the product of narratorial mediation. For instance, the narrator's directives demonstrate his self-consciousness in the narrative creation;

the narratorial commentaries are obvious efforts to expose the intentional context for the desired interpretation; the variations of reported speech may betray the narrator's manoeuvring of the characters; the shift of temporal scheme may show the artificiality of causal arrangement; the narrative stratification turns the narrator into a character, thus exposing his "authority" as fallible. If the reader attends seriously to these metafictional traces—i.e. the formal features that point to the fictional nature of the narrative—the verisimilitude necessary to lead him into a suspension of disbelief and a whole-hearted acceptance of the desired interpretation may then be destroyed.

In traditional fiction, these metafictional features are conventionalized and thus naturalized to the extent that they can do no harm to the verisimilitude and interpretative guidance but, on the contrary, reinforce them.[9] These exposed metafictional operations, indeed, come within the reader's expectations, as convention has already de-semanticized their metafictional traces. This explains why the great amount of traces of narrative activity in traditional Chinese fiction, including some very unnatural narratorial intrusions such as the use of poems as commentaries, does not necessarily dampen the verisimilitude. Similarly, many of the nineteenth-century European novels which abound in narratorial intrusions (e.g. the novels of Balzac) could still be hailed by literary historians as among the highest achievements of realism.

What contemporary metafiction does is to de-naturalize and re-semanticize the conventional metafictional features, thus foregrounding them so that they can no longer be ignored by readers. The verisimilitude of fiction is then ridiculed and irrevocably destroyed. This kind of metafiction can be called a metafiction of "self-reflexity", or rather, self-parody. This kind of narratorial foregrounding has been present in the European writing since the works of such writers as Diderot, Sterne and others, in the so-called "self-conscious novel". But before the twentieth century the self-conscious novel was never part of the mainstream of Western fiction.[10]

In contemporary Chinese literature, before the emergence of Avant-Garde fiction, elements of self-reflexity were already visible in such works as Love in the *Brocade Valley* (*Jinxiugu Zhi Lian* 锦绣谷之恋, by the woman writer Wang Anyi王安忆)[11] In this short novel, the implicit, non-participant narrator, with constant self-revealing intrusions, seems more nervous than the protagonist in her adulterous adventure.[12] An interesting irony is then created at the expense of verisimilitude, though without destroying it totally. Some critics have called this kind of fiction "mid-fiction".[13] The experimental wing of contemporary Chinese fiction since 1985 seems to have been undergoing a continuous process of evolution from conventional "realistic" fiction through mid-fiction to fully-fledged metafiction.

The works of Ma Yuan, the Chinese writer who was based in Tibet for long years, can be regarded as typical self-reflexity metafiction. The narrator in Ma Yuan's stories and novels is eager to seize every change to remind the readers that he is only fabricating, not reporting something that has supposedly happened in reality. In *Old Death* (*Jiu Si*旧死)[14] a parallel plot line is installed to tell how the narrator "I" engineers the whole story of a mother killing her murderous son. In *Fabrication* (Xugou 虚构) the narrator never wearies of pointing out that the narrated world of his strange amorous adventure in a Tibetan leprosy settlement is nothing but a creation of his fantasy. These novels are narrated in such a realistic way that they could well

be read as fascinating "true stories" but for the narrator's self-debunking intrusions. In the series of novels starting from *The Seaside Is Also A World* (*Haibian Yeshi Yige Shijie* 海边也是一个世界) and *Tempted by the Gangdisi* (*Gangdisi de Youhuo* 冈底斯的诱惑), two characters, Lu Gao and Yao Liang, who form a so-called "pseudo-couple" as a double surrogate of the implied author, constantly challenge the narrator not only by taking over the narrative voice but also by dragging in another character bearing the name of the author, Ma Yuan, to join in their own narrative activity. In *The Poetics of Death* (*Siwang de Shiyi* 死亡的诗意), some "absolutely genuine" fragments, e.g. look-alike police reports, are collaged on to the context of apparent fictionality. Thus the narrational mediation is foregrounded as an almost masochistic self-exposure, and the fabrication is shown to possess more power to induce the sense of reality than the verisimilitude of conventional fiction.

The concept of fiction about fiction, however, can be extended to mean something else—a fictional work about or alluding to other, or other groups of, fictional works. It is, then, a fiction dependent on its pre-text. Of course the pre-text reference is omnipresent in any text, and forms part of the contextual pressure that an interpreter of the text can never ignore. But if the text intentionally exploits the reader's memory of some previous text or texts, and uses it or parodies it to achieve a meaning that otherwise cannot be deciphered at all, it is then a piece of what I suggest might be called "pre-textual metafiction".

Most of Yu Hua's works can be read as pre-textual metafiction. The objects of Yu Hua's parody are genres that have enjoyed the greatest meaning-power in Chinese culture, most particularly history, the genre at the top of the Chinese cultural hierarchy. The suffocating smell of blood in *1986* (*Yijiu Baliu*, 1987) and in "The past and the punishment" (往事与刑罚, 1987) deprives history of its meaning-power, making these works into anti-histories; "The noon when the north-west wind howls" (*Xibei Feng Huxiao de Zhengwu*, 西北风呼啸的正午, 1986) and "The ephemeral world" (Shishi Ru Yan 世事如烟,1988) are an anti-Filial Scripture genre (Xiao Jing, 孝经) as they turn upside down the filial-piety-centred Chinese ethics; *One kind of reality* subverts patriarchal family morality in the manner of an anti-Family Admonition genre (Jia Xun, 家训). In some of his other works, Yu Hua aims at the popular genres that have for centuries enjoyed the greatest moralistic influence over the masses: "The mistake on the river Lank" (*He Bian de Cuowu*, 河边的错误, 1987) can be read as anti-Court-Case (Gong'an, 公案) fiction; "A classical romance" (*Gudian Aiqing*, 古典爱情, 1988) as anti-Talent and Beauty (*Caizi Jiaren*, 才子佳人) fiction, and "The bloody plum flower" (*Xianxue Meihua*, 鲜血梅花, 1989) as anti-Martial Arts (*Wuxia*, 武侠) fiction. In these works, the traditional narrative conventions of the respective sub-genres are followed so strictly that the generic conventions become targets of merciless parody.

If we push the notion "fiction about fiction" further, we arrive at a third kind of metafiction. All meaning systems that connect man with the world—consciousness, imagination, experience, knowledge, human relationship, history, culture, ideology, etc., can all be regarded as texts in the broadest sense, since they all structure or impart meanings. Thus the fictional texts about these "fictional texts" can be regarded as

fiction about fiction. In this sense too, all works of fiction are more or less metafictional, as they all engage these meaning systems as their subject matters. But traditional fiction holds that they are real, describable objects that fiction can and should reflect. In metafiction, however, these are regarded as man-made fictional systems composed more or less in the same way as the narrative text, and human beings are basically "fiction-makers" in their relations to the world. This is metafiction in its most expanded sense, and I suggest calling it "para-fictional metafiction".

Among the most significant works of recent Chinese Avant-Garde fiction, Ge Fei's works can be read as examples of para-fictional metafiction. Ge Fei's short novels and stories can be divided into two groups. In the first group, which includes his earliest published story "Man Can't See Grass Grow" (*Ren Kanbujian Cao Shengzhang* 人看不见草生长, 1987), and "The brown birds" (褐色鸟群, 1988), "Blue-yellow" (*Qing huang* 青黄, 1988), and *A Trip to Yelang* (*Yelang Zhi Xing* 夜郎之行, 1989), Ge Fei tries to build an unreal or even anti-real reality where the imaginative overwhelms the apparently real, evoking in these works a powerful dream-like atmosphere. The second group, short novels which include his best works—*The Lost Boat*, *New Year's Eve* (Danian 大年, 1988) and Harmonium (*Fengqin* 风琴, 1988)—is explicitly anchored against the background of tumultuous periods in modern Chinese history, yet none of these is a historical novel. The mesh of misunderstandings and double entendres shrouding these short novels, and their labyrinths of conspiracies and counter-conspiracies, are presented as conflicts between various value systems. In this constant conflict, history is so helplessly subjected to re-shaping or mutilation that not even a possibility of truth remains. The lost boat, a short novel that attracted the attention of film-makers with its interesting plot, plays on the time-honoured theme of love and death. But the theme is replayed as a double parody on the conflict between the cruel code systems of history and those of personal infatuation. Truth is shown to be no more than the slave of capricious norms, and history only a succession of suppressions of truth and assassination of meanings.

In the study of modern or contemporary Chinese literature, there is always an "influence trap". Anything new can be denigrated as a pale imitation of an outdated Western fashion, which rules out any serious critical appraisal. In the early 1980s, modernism was regarded a derogatory term. A large number of critics declared that modernism in contemporary Chinese literature was genuine, and therefore, dangerous. In the second half of the decade, there arose the accusation of "bogus modernism" (*wei xiandai pai* 伪现代派). Those same critics now accused Chinese modernism of being a "modernism without modern sensibility", because "there is no soil for modernism in under-developed China". Avant-Garde fiction, with the strongest flavour of "modernity" in contemporary Chinese literature, could hardly escape the accusation of being an Avant-Gardism without a genuine Avant-Garde sensibility.[15] Indeed, Avant-Garde fiction has been repeatedly attacked as being an imitation, or even plagiarism, of Western Avant-Garde literature.

Fortunately, it is easier to sort out this kind of argument in contemporary Chinese literature than it was with the May Fourth literature of the 1920s, when most fiction writers were themselves translators and critics of Western literature. The majority of fiction writers today, however, do not read Western fictional works in the original,

thanks to the more minute division of labour in Chinese literacy circles. If we check the publication list of Western literature in Chinese over recent years, we can see that none of the recognized masters of metafiction—Donald Barthelme, John Fowles, John Barth, Robert Coover, Italo Calvino, Samuel Beckett and others—as had an adequate translation or critical review. The most widely known of recent metafictional novels, John Fowles's *The French lieutenant's woman*, was translated and published in 1985, but the most characteristically metafictional chapter, Chap. 13, was omitted, perhaps for fear that readers might not be able to understand it, or, more possibly, because the translator himself was baffled by it. Perhaps Jorge Borges is an exception to this general neglect, and his influence is noticeable in the works of Ge Fei and certain other Avant-Garde authors. Nevertheless, Borges, with his unique yet narrow style, cannot be responsible for the wide spectrum of Chinese Avant-Garde fiction.

The concept of "meta-" itself seems to have remained totally unknown to Chinese authors and critics. The criticism of Avant-Garde fiction in the last few years has concentrated on such thematic issues as "anti-civilization" or "escapism".[16] A number of Taiwanese authors have been deliberately experimenting with self-reflexive metafiction (*houshe xiaoshuo*, 后设小说, post-fiction, as it is called in Taiwan, very misleading translation of "meta-" which is now translated by the mainland linguists as yuan 元) but their efforts have attracted hardly any attention in mainland literary circles, as self-reflexity metafiction can so easily lapse into a mere play with formal techniques.

The meta-sensibility in recent Mainland China fiction seems to be something of which even the Chinese metafictional writers themselves are not aware. For this simple reason it can be concluded that metafiction in China cannot be a "bogus metafiction" or an imported fashion. The emergence of meta-sensibility has been brought about by the development of Chinese culture itself.

Looking back to the Chinese philosophical tradition, one can see that meta-sensibility has been perceived and discussed since ancient times, especially in Taoism and Buddhism. The first Taoist philosophical work the *Daode jing* was already expounding on the distinction between the "wayable" (ke-dao 可道) or "nameable" (*ke-ming* 可名) world and the constant "way" or "name" that reigns over it. Zen Buddhists held that "the supreme buddha" is "no buddha", and that the world of obsession (mi 迷) is totally different from the world of awakening (wu 悟) in that "Obsession is knowledge while awakening is wisdom; obsession follows matters while awakening seeks for causes". The esoteric sixteenth-century novel *Supplementary Chapters to the Journey to the West* (Xiyou bu 西游补) can be said to be the first Chinese metafictional novel. Apart from its parody of *The Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji*西游记), there are many passages that dramatize the idea of across-level control of meaning.[17] The Chinese have every right to boast that their ancestors had a much sharper perception of meta-sensibility than their Western contemporaries. This sensitive understanding, however, could not have led directly to modern meta-sensibility, as its closeness to the modern idea of multi-level control is only seen in retrospect. Meta-sensibility in modern Chinese fiction had to wait until the mid-1980s when the intellectual and literary climate was ripe enough for such a development.

The "Methodology Fever" (*Fangfa Lun Re*方法论热) that swept Chinese intellectual circles in the early 1980s provided the soil for the rise of metafiction. The heated debate on the weakness and strength of Chinese culture that started in 1985 finally brought the long cultural awakening to its fruition. If, as some Western scholars hold, meta-sensibility in the West is the result of the pressure of the information explosion, meta-sensibility has arisen in China today in answer to the pressing need to understand the problems of Chinese culture and history, the enormity and complexity of which have been baffling Chinese intellectuals hitherto.

The anxiety caused by this vast task of re-evaluating Chinese culture is noticeable in the fiction of Avant-Garde writers. If in the early half of the 1980s the so called Wound fiction and Reform fiction still managed to flourish by answering the social need for interpretation guidance, fiction in the mid-1980s was no longer able to do that, because a deep distrust of the existing interpretative systems had already led to a crisis of codes. The so-called New Wave in almost all the genres of Chinese art and literature was, indeed, based on a denial of common codes.

This crisis of codes was first demonstrated by the "Stray Youth" fiction,[18] in the works of Liu Suola (*You Have No Choice*, [Ni Bie Wu Xuanze, 你别无运择], 1985),[19] Xu Xing (*Variations on No Theme*, [Wu Zhuti Bianzou, 无主题变奏], 1985),[20] Hong Feng (*Going to the Funeral*, [Bensang, 奔丧], 1986),[21] Wu Bin (*City Monologues*,[Chengshi Dubai, 城市独白], 1987-1988),[22] which gave a vivid expression to the loss of values among Chinese urban youth. The individualism and existentialism that could be strongly felt in the fictional works a few years earlier on the Red Guards who were sent-down to the countryside was now discarded as an over-zealous clinging to values that had already been lost.

Nevertheless, self-abandonment and self-disillusionment are still a kind of longing after values, though in a negative way. A frustration at the want of codes is perceptible. The young protagonists do not actually enjoy freedom from any ideological guidance; they despise it, yet cannot help feeling pain at its loss. In the last few years authors like Wang Shuo have shown that young people narcissistic obsession with nihilism can be enjoyably playful, and that the scorn for values can be turned into financially viable popular entertainment.[23]

Another direction taken by the New Waves was the Roots-Seeking fiction which attracted great attention in 1986-8. But wherever it tried to find its roots among the national minorities (Hong Feng's "Shepherds' Song on the Prairie" [*Bo'er Jinzhi Muge*, 勃尔金支牧歌], 1985), in the mountainous regions (Li Rui's Series of Stories, *Thick Earth*, [Houtu, 厚土], 1986),[24] among the simple country people (Li Hangyu's Series of Stories, *The Gechuan River* [Gechuan Jiang Xilie,葛川江系列], 1986-8), among the grandparents who "lived by intuition" (Mo Yan's *Red Sorghum* [Hong Gaoliang, 红高粱],1986)[25] or in the non-mainstream mode of life in Chinese culture (A Cheng 阿城's *The Chess Master* [Qi wang, 棋王], 1985)[26]—all its works represent a frantic search for a cure for the crisis of the cultural metalanguage,[27] even if that search leads to an unhappy, disillusioned negation of Chinese civilization (Han Shaogong's [韩少功], *Daddy Daddy Daddy* [Ba Ba Ba, 爸爸爸], 1986).[28]

In flinging itself out to the margins of culture, the Roots-Seeking fiction may certainly be seen as part of the general centrifugal movement that seems to be the

tendency of modern art in this century. But romanticization of the "untainted" way of life as a panacea for the senescent Chinese culture was soon discovered to be a wishful rather than real solution to the crisis of codes.

Meta-sensibility is, then, a fundamental doubt about the possibility of creating a fictional world to "reflect" the real world (which is, after all, the result of a sharing of the same codes by the reader and the author), and an affirmation of the artificiality of the narrated world coupled with a total rejection of the search for its truth value. In this way the hidden controlling mechanism of the narrative—the narrative conventions, pre-text, intertextuality, value systems interpretative guidance, etc.—are pulled out on to the textual surface, exposed, and subjected to parody. What is being presented in the text is then the manoeuvring of the puppets instead of the manoeuvred puppets, since the subject of metafiction is no longer the world existing independently outside fiction.

This fiction no longer depicts experience. The narrative text itself is the experience. What the reader faces is no longer the expected interpretation of experience. He has to form for himself an interpretation which the text neither denies nor encourages, once all meta-lingual systems—historical, ethical, rational, ideological, etc.—are falsified. In other words, every reader has to be a critic able to reach beyond the text.

Since the depth is pulled to the surface, metafiction persists on the surface of presentation. This is what makes Avant-Garde fiction the first genuinely formalist school of fiction in the history of modern Chinese literature. In these works, content is dissolved in form and seems to be only an element of form. To deal with such fiction, the critical language of traditional literary scholarship is no longer adequate. Instead of a profound treatment of theme we see only a rejection of themes; instead of an organic structure, we see disintegration and fragmentation; instead of an effort to produce 4 round characters, we find most characters in metafiction flat and one-dimensional. This last development seems like a regression. But 4 round characters are essential only in those works that strive to press home a complex theme in order, as their authors see it, to depict the complexity of the world. Since works of metafiction no longer concern themselves with the outside world but with their own world or the world of intertextuality, the network of psychological motivation activating the characters no longer deserves their attention.

This "flat" characterization results in a number of changes in the narratological characteristics of Chinese fiction. To mention one of the most conspicuous, in metafictional works direct reported speech, in quoted form or in free form, is greatly reduced. In this way, the personalized tones of the characters' words are diluted by the narrative context, whereas in traditional Chinese vernacular novels, and in the works of those modern writers who seek to revive the tradition (for instance in the post-Yan'an period when fiction was encouraged to return to traditional forms so as to serve the masses and the revolution), one of the important conventions is the dominance of the direct- quote form of reported speech.

When the critic Li Jie (李劼) suggested in 1988 that the young Avant-Garde writer Yu Hua was the most representative successor of the spirit of Lu Xun (鲁迅), the great founding father of modern Chinese fiction,[29] his words sounded like over-praise. Now we can see that with Avant-Garde fiction, contemporary Chinese

fiction has not only made a great return to the glories of the May Fourth Movement but is, in many aspects, beginning to surpass it.

Avant-Garde fiction represents not a direct critique of Chinese culture but rather a more successful invigoration of the Chinese cultural heritage, because, so far as fiction is concerned, a fundamental questioning of the operation of the cultural meta-language is more helpful to the re-orientation of Chinese culture in the modern world than proposing or defending any given set of cultural codes. The May Fourth fiction attacked the old meta-lingual systems with what the writers conceived of as a new and progressive metalanguage. With the May Fourth authors, and Lu Xun is no exception, "the new in place of the old" seemed to be a sure cure for all the ills of Chinese culture. This tendency, though the exact reverse of Roots-Seeking fiction seventy years later, was actually very similar to it because neither of these schools had shaken off their obsession with creating a new set of codes. Avant-Garde fiction today, with its powerful meta-sensibility, tries to expose all manoeuvring of meaning by any meta-language, thus negating the rationality of codes. This apparent nihilism actually springs from an ontological awareness of the need for thoroughgoing cultural criticism.

Avant-Garde fiction does in one sense suggest an anarchy of signs, a void of meaning. But the building of a new cultural meta-language is hardly the task of fiction. The re-orientation and rejuvenation of a culture in crisis is a vast and complicated process. Serious literature can only stimulate the regenerative power latent within the culture itself. The reason why the Literature Revolution starting in 1918 soon lapsed into the Literature of the Revolution of mid-1920s, putting a premature end to the movement of cultural criticism, was nothing other than its over-hasty search for a cure for the ailing culture.

Avant-Garde writers in China today seem to be aware of this danger. The meta-sensibility demonstrated in their works indicates that they do not intend to give up the stand of pure criticism as their May Fourth predecessors did. There is, therefore, every reason to expect that, if its meta-sensibility does not wane in the long and hard struggle ahead, this first avant-garde school of Chinese fiction will achieve more than any fictional school in modern Chinese history has done before, and so help to provide Chinese culture with another precious opportunity for re-orientation.

There has been real pressure to make Avant-Garde fiction give up its metafictional stand. Before the Tiananmen incident of 1989, the immediate need for a political reformist movement brought on the accusation of Avant-Garde writers as "art for-art's sakers" The well-known pro-democratic journalist Liu Binyan for instance, has been criticizing these young writers as "not caring enough about the society and the people". It was indeed very strange to see the left and the right political wings frown on the same literary trend. The situation remains, though criticism from the reformists is no longer heard as they themselves have been silenced. Nor has the voice of the conservatives been loud since they feel obliged to concentrate their criticism on politically dissident literary expressions. However, publication and critical appraisal of the Avant-Garde writers has definitely been discouraged. Before June 1989, Ma Yuan, Yu Hua and Ge Fei, the three most outstanding Avant-Garde writers discussed in the present essay, had had a surprisingly large number of critical reviews. Because

they were prepared before the incident, the collections of the works of the latter two, in simple pocket editions, were on the market around the end of 1989, but only in small print numbers. They were immediately sold out. They continue to publish, though much less actively.

Generally speaking, the discouragement is tacit. Since none of the pre-eminent Avant-Garde writers and critics has publicly changed course, one may hope that the discouragement will not silence them, and that Avant-Garde fiction as a movement will survive. No matter what happens next, it has already written a glorious page in the history of modern Chinese literature worthy of rigorous critical study.

Notes

1. Wu Liang, "The modernistic tendencies of Chinese fiction in the countryside", *Zhongguo Xiangcun Xiaoshuo Li de Ruogan Xiandai Zhuyi Xianxiang* (中国乡村小说里的若干现代主义现象), Wenyi Bao (文艺报), 6 February, 1988, 2.
2. Shouhuo (收获), no. 5, 1987, Su Tong's works are mostly collected in *Yijiu Sansi Nian de Taowang* (一九三四年的逃亡, Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press, 1988).
3. Shouhuo, no. 5, 1987.
4. Shouhuo, no. 6, 1987. Ge Fei's works are mostly collected in *Mizhou* (迷舟, Beijing: Zuojia Chubanshe, 1989). The English translation of the short novel will appear as the title piece in the collection of Chinese New Wave fiction, *The Lost Boat*, edited by me and to be published by the Wells weep Press, London.
5. *Beijing Wenxue* (北京文学) no. 10, 1987. Most of Yu Hua's works are collected in *Shiba Sui Chumen Yuanxing* (十八岁由门远行), Beijing: Zuojia Chubanshe, 1989. The English translation of the short novel A kind of reality will be published in The lost boat anthology (see preceding note).
6. See Roman Jakobson's definition of "the metalingual function" of speech; "Whenever the addresser and/or the addressee need to check up whether they use the same code, speech is focused on the code: it performs a metalingual (i.e. glossing) function" ("Closing statement: linguistics and poetics", in Thomas Sebeok (ed.), Style in linguistics New York: MIT Press, 1960, 356).
7. Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 218.
8. The term metafiction was more or less established by around 1980. Imhof Rudiger says in "The author's note" to his Contemporary metafiction: a poetological study of metafiction in English since 1939 (Heidelberg, 1986), in the early 1980 s, the discussion "only attracted a small group of readers of awkwardly difficult narrative texts", while by the end of the 1980 s, "Metafiction has now been firmly integrated into the canon of fashionable areas of research for aspiring critics and scholars".
9. Roland Barthes insists that "discovering lost diaries, receiving letters, or finding manuscripts are efforts made by the bourgeois to naturalize narrative" (Roland Barthes, "Introduction to structural analysis of narrative", in Image-music-text, New York: 1977,187).

10. Robert Alter in Partial magic, one of the earliest and most important works on the discussion of metafiction, holds that "the self-conscious novel" is "the other" tradition in relation to what F. R. Leavis called "the Great Tradition", and the study of it "a balance" to the scholarship of the "serious novel". (Partial magic, Berkeley, 1975, 3.)
11. Wang Anyi's highly controversial short novel series Three loves (San lian, 三恋) have been collected in *Huangshan Zhi Lian* (荒山之恋, Hong Kong: Nanyue Chubanshe, 1988), which includes *Love in the Brocade Valley*.
12. At the beginning the narrator steps forward to flaunt his (or perhaps we should say "her", but we never know, as the narrator personality is never revealed throughout the novel) control of the narrative, "I want to tell a story, about a woman". In the middle of the work, when the critical moment in the adulterous courtship is about to arrive, the narrator says, "Yes, I know something is going to happen. Among all these people on the tour, perhaps only I know it." But nothing real does happen in the adventurous relationship. And at the end, "beside all these, I can't think of anything else. I can't help but let her go, walking away from us, alone, without a story."
13. This is a term invented by Alan Wild (see Larry McCafferey, *The Metafictional Muse*, Pittsburg, 1982, 263) to denote to fiction "that operates on a middle ground between realism and reflexity". Such fiction is experimental to different degrees but does not primarily depend on the "reflexity method".
14. Shouhuo, no. 6 1987. Ma Yuan's works before 1987 are collected in *Gangdisi de Youhuo* (冈底斯的诱惑, Beijing: Zhongguo Zuojia Chubanshe). The English translation of the short novel Fabrication will be included in The lost boat (see n. 4 above).
15. Wang Gan (王干) "The Failure of Counter-Culture: a Critique of The Recent Fiction of Mo Yan" (*Fan Wenhua De Shibai: Mo Yan Jinqi Xiaoshuo Pipan* 反文化的失败:莫言近期小说批判, Dushu [读书] no. 10, 1988).
16. Wang Meng (王蒙), and Wang Gan, "The retrogression of literature: Counter-Culture, Anti- Civilization, Anti-Sublimity" (*Wenxue de Ni Xiang Xing: Fan Wenhue, Fan Wenming, Fan Chonggao,* 文学的逆向性:反文化,反文明,反崇高, Shanghai Wenxue, no. 5, 1989). This essay seems to represent the highest understanding the Mainland critics have reached on avant-gardism in contemporary Chinese literature. In the same issue of Shanghai Wenxue there is a discussion "Defend Avant-Garde fiction" (Baowei Xianfeng Wenxue 保卫先锋文学) chaired by the aesthetician Zhu Dake (朱大可), in which many extremist statements are made such as "retreating from the space of civilization ahead of others". There is an obvious want of theoretical support for these statements.
17. For instance in ch. iv of the novel, when Wukong enters the Million-Mirror Chamber of the King Xiaoyue, he sees his old friend Liu Boqin in the mirror. Wukong bows and asks, "How come we are here together?" Boqin says "How can you say we are together? You are in the world of others. I am in your world. We aren't together. We aren't together."

18. Chinese critical circles have not been in agreement on the name for this trend. Some name it the Chinese "Beat Generation" (Kuadiao Pai 垮掉派). Others call it Chinese "Fiction of Hippies" (Xipi Shi 嬉皮士).
19. Most of Liu Suola's works are collected in *Ni bie Wu Xuanze*, (你别无选择, Beijing: Zuojia Chubanshe, 1986).
20. Most of Xu Xing's works are collected in *Wu Zhuti Bianzou* (无主题, Beijing: Zuojia Chubanshe, 1989).
21. Most of Hong Feng's works are collected in *Han Hai* (瀚海, Beijing: Zuojia Chubanshe, 1989).
22. Most of Wu Bin's works are collected in *Chengshi Dubai* (郊市独白, Beijing: Zuojia Chubanshe, 1989).
23. Wang Shuo has been extremely productive, and most of his works have been selling well. Three films after his novels were produced in 1988. *Wan de Jiushi Xintiao* (玩的就是心跳) is, hitherto, his best work, and one of the most commercially successful Chinese novels in recent years.
24. Most of Li Rui's works are collected in Hong Fangzi (红房子, Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1988).
25. Mo Yan has been extremely productive. His shorter works are collected in *Touming de Hong Luobo* (透明的红萝卜, Beijing: Zuojia Chubanshe, 1986); *Hong Gaoliang Xilie* (红高粱系列, Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1987), and *Huanle Shisan Zhang* (欢乐十三章, Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe). Some of his works will appear in English in a collection being prepared by Renditions in Hong Kong.
26. A Cheng's short novel series *San Wang* (三王) can be found in *Qi Wang* (棋王, Beijing, Zuojia Chubanshe, 1986). Its English translation *Three Kings* (tr. Bonnie McDougall) was published by Collins, London, 1990.
27. Zheng Wanlong (郑万隆), one of the most ardent Roots-Seeking writers, claimed that his purpose was "to use myth, legend and fantasy to build up a frame for fiction, in order to establish finally our own conceptions of ideals, of values, of morals, and of culture" (Wo de Gen 我的根, Shanghai Wenxue, no. 1, 1987, 45).
28. This short novel was published in Renmin Wenxue, no. 6, 1985. Some of Han Shaogong's works will be published in English in a collection being prepared by Renditions in Hong
29. Li Jie "On the New Wave Fiction of Contermporary China" (Lun Dangdai Zhongguo Xianfeng Xiaoshuo 论中国当代新潮小说), Zhongshan, 钟山, no. 5, 1988, 1

Chapter 12
Pure Poetry, Impure Criticism, and the Power of Academia: Some Paradoxes Concerning the History of New-Wave Poetry

1

The few haggard-looking young poets who were mimeographing the first issue of *Jintian* in the winter of 1978 knew that what they were doing was highly dangerous, but they had hardly any idea of how dangerous it could be. Unlike private reading or the hand-copied texts that had been circulated during the Cultural Revolution years, printed text is meant for history, as it can induce other writings to form a chain of meaning production that could be turned by critical interpretation into history.

Almost one decade and a half has passed, and the connotations of the time have been assuming a historical shape in interpretation.

There has never been in China a poetry movement so closely connected with criticism. Not long after its start, the inundation of the new wave poetry flowed into the river-bed of the new-wave criticism.

There are simply too many names for this period of Chinese poetry that we are to deal with, and almost all of them are lamentable misnomers. For the sake of convenience, I shall use the terms Misty and post-Misty poetry, but sometimes put them together under the heading new-wave poetry, and I shall call the critical efforts in its defense the new-wave criticism.

2

The fifteen years of new-wave poetry has been a movement of purification of poetry unprecedented in Chinese literature.

Poetry has been regarded as one of the most prestigious genres in the generic hierarchy of Chinese culture, almost next only to historiography, but certainly the highest among literary genres. This high status brought not only honor but also undue cultural responsibility, and poetry has had to perform many functions that belong to other social discourses. "The *Odes* serve to stimulate the mind. They must be used for purposes of self-contemplation. They teach the art of sociability. They show how to regulate feelings of resentment. From them you learn the more immediate duty of serving one's father, and the remoter one of serving one's prince."[1] And even, "If you do not learn the *Odes*, you will not be fit to converse with."[2]

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Y. Zhao, *The River Fans Out*, China Academic Library,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6_12

In the fifth century when literature was first clearly defined in *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* the Truth (*Dao*), the Sages, and the Canons formed the trinity core for all literary discourses, and "no exemplary use" seems to be the severest accusation for a poem.[3] Against such a formidable literary pragmatics, the assertion of poetry as a discourse in and for itself could only be very timid.

In the two thousand years of Chinese literary theory, there have been very few who dared to argue that poetry should be pure. The earliest seems to be Cao Pi's argument "Poetry inclines toward beauty" (Shifu Yu Li)[4]; Sikong Tu of the ninth century suggested that among other styles one could be "winning all elegance without a word." Yan Yu of the thirteenth century argued that better poetry is "neither to be entangled in reason, nor to be explained by words." Wang Shizhen of the seventeenth century held that poetry could be "devoid of the physical (*se*) and the phenomenal (*xiang*)." After every four hundred years, there would appear an argument in favor of pure poetry. Is it time to see another one?

But if we look back at those scattered critical efforts, we can see some characteristics in those arguments.

First, the strategy of negative defining. The Chinese apologists for pure poetry have never even tried to explain what pure poetry is. They seem to have been able only to suggest what is not pure poetry, or what should be excluded from poetry. Pure poetry appears hardly definable. Falsification seems the only logic, and exclusion the only definition.[5]

Hence the second point: there is perhaps no truly pure poetry, but only relatively purer poetry. To become pure is to free poetry from this or that non-poetical function, making it unparaphrasable or unreplaceable by any other discourses.

Third, we can see that all the Chinese apologists of purer poetry are attracted or even obsessed with Buddhism, as they had to turn to the non-mainstream or even alien thoughts for support. Confucian cultural philosophy definitely does not encourage pure poetry. All these three characteristics re-appeared in Chinese poetry of the recent years.

3

New-Wave Poetry has been a continuous negation of everything non-poetical. From that loud shout of Bei Dao's "I Don't Believe," to Professor Sun Shaozhen's declaration, "They disdain to serve as the mouthpiece of the *Zeitgeist*, or to extol great achievements beyond their own mind,"[6] and to the "No-no-ists'" (*Feifei Zhuyi*) Manifesto that demands "no abstraction" or "no (semantic) certitude,"[7] to Xie Mian's title "A Charming Escape" (*Meili de Dunyi*)[8], to Xu Jingya's title "The Death of Criterion" (*Guinie Zhi Si*),[9] to Han Dong's title "Beyond the three worldly roles" (*Sange Shisu Jiaose Zhiwai*),[10] this is an irresistible negating movement.

In this sense, Misty poetry would, I am sure, have passed to post-Misty Poetry sooner or later, and more or less in the same direction that it actually took. In order to shake off socio-political control, Misty poets took "the liberation of man" as their central concern. To jettison any non-political responsibility, post-Misty poetry cares more about "the liberation of poetry." If Misty poetry is more humanitarian, post-Misty poetry is then more formalistic.[11]

We can come closer to see a few of the negations in concrete terms.

The first is the so-called de-sublimation—the sarcastic, the subversive, the arrogant in new Poetry. This is a tendency that many people frown upon. But wasn't Misty poetry de-sublimed in comparison with the state-endorsed eulogy Poetry before it? Post-Misty poetry has only proceeded from thematic de-sublimation onto stylistic de-sublimation. Indeed an obsession with language would naturally lead to irony and paradox, to the inbuilt ludic elements in poetic language. That is why post-Misty poetry has a sense of humor that has rarely been seen in Chinese literature.

Secondly, the de-rationalization—the bizarre, the fanciful, the abnormal. In the early 1980s the accusation was already loud that Misty poetry pursued irrationality at the time when China was in a age badly in need of rationality. Post-Misty poetry, as some critics have observed, advanced further in this direction. The center of the New-Wave moved from the "rational North" to the "sensual South" after 1985.[12] That, somehow, coincided with the emergence of avant-garde fiction in the Yangzi Valley and Yangzi Delta. Actually, the needs of society seem to be exactly what poetry evades. Only by doing so is poetry able to perform its own cultural function.

The third negation is the so-called de-civilization—the coarse, the rude, the vulgar, which are more frequently seen in post-Misty poetry. Indeed the New-wave has been swaying between the two poles of the social and cultural and the personal. It was none other than the trend of "culture poems" that pulled Misty poetry from self-expressiveness, only to be pushed back into the consciousness of individuality as represented by *Manghan* (Rash Guys), *Tamen* (They) and other groups. However, we now again witness the emerging of national sensibility, as seen in the China complex of the poets exiled in the West.

From this we can see that the Misty—post-Misty division is not a distinction between two generations of poets, but a rough division of stages of the same New-wave. Was it not Jiang He and Yang Lian who pioneered the "culture poems" which led to *Zhengti Zhuyi* (Totalism), *Xin Chuantong Zhuyi* (New Traditionalism) and *Hanshi Pai* (Han Poetry)? Is it not Bei Dao, Duo Duo, and Gu Cheng who concern themselves more about the national when they find themselves stranded in strange lands?

4

It seems, however, that it is the post-Misty poets who love to talk about the purity of poetry.[13]

The idea of purer poetry rarely wins the favor of modern Chinese critics, including some most ardent defenders of the new-wave. Huang Ziping, for instance, argues that pure literature is "a romantic myth," "a new centrality that is being built while the old one is being subverted."[14] Xie Mian, the leader of new-wave criticism, also argues, "The influence and. dominance of politics and sociology are not yet, and will perhaps never be, a thing of the past in Chinese poetry."[15]

This disagreement, I think, arises from the confusion of the different roles played by poetry and criticism. Purification is only a possible tendency of poetry which, as I see it, can only win a very small part of writers. Criticism, on the contrary, can hardly be pure, as its task is to reach beyond the text to the ideological and cultural

control behind it, that is, to find impurity in the apparent pure, or the impurity beside the expressed impure.

This is actually saying that no literary work is pure, and purification of poetry is only a fantasy. Indeed any literary text provides a socially, politically or ideologically coded fantasy. It may imagine itself to be the product of free thinking, but in fact it can never be. This, however, does not mean that poetry is entitled to show its awareness of its own "meaning," since literary writing is essentially a deliberate withholding of voice.[16]

When it really talks about its philosophical, political, or ideological or any other kind of "meaning," it is more often than not misled by its own imagination, or intends to mislead.[17] The meaning of a poem is not conceived before the text is written, nor does it exist independently within the poetic text, but is to be constructed by criticism.

In short, poetry is opaque while criticism is transparent. The poetical text is mute, or rather, speaks in a dramatic falsetto. Only criticism can force it to speak, to reveal the voice behind the noise.

5

Poetry and criticism are two discourses that proceed in opposite directions; one prizes purity, and the other can function only in pursuing impurity.[18] If we assume that a poem is an interpretation of the world by the poet, then criticism is not an extension of this interpretation, but its counter-interpretation. That is to say, it aims at retracing the socio-cultural production of the text. If the writing of a poem could be called a process of purification, criticism then reverses it, making itself a process of impurification.

Poetry as a genre then seems like a huge garbage dumping ground that needs to be cleaned up, but once it is cleaned up, if it could be done, there is only a spiritual desert left where the poets find themselves frustratingly lonely. Criticism makes this kind of loneliness meaningful. When a poet says that Life is a Net, we agree, "How true!" But criticism explains why in that particular cultural circumstance that poet writes that way. So criticism is to demythologize poetical texts by pointing out the eternal discrepancies between ideology and historical movement.

It is true that historical movement itself is essentially unfathomable as history is, in the last analysis, a diachronic meaning-construction. What criticism offers is nothing but a new, possibly more convincing way of constructing the meaning of the text.

Here comes another basic paradox in the history of the new-wave poetry. It is the conservative attackers who keep pointing out that New Wave criticism is very impure, while the apologists of the new-wave poetry have never acknowledged this.[19] Allow me to quote Ai Qing: "Weird poems are not fearful. What is fearful is weird criticism,"[20] and Ke Yan: "You advertise 'misty' in art, but in ideological inclination you are simply too far from 'misty.'"[21] I have to say that hers is a sharp observation on the opposition between poetry and criticism. Without new-wave criticism, as represented in the "Three Rises"[22] the new-wave poetry would be amorphous, unshaped, nondescript, and thus non-historical. The form of new-wave criticism is the true form of new-wave poetry. The history of Misty poetry is not to be misty.

6

Now we come to the last, perhaps most puzzling, paradox about new-wave poetry—the paradox of pluralism, or, as I prefer to call it, polycentrism.

It was indeed the apologists of the new-wave who keep calling for "tolerance and magnanimity" (*rongren yu kuanrong*). Xie Mian insisted in 1980 that "We should allow at least some poems to be hard to understand."[23] And as late as 1987 he still argued, "Poetry in China today is not a biological scene where one school rises at the expense of another, but a picture of coexistence and concurrence."[24] That is a good tactic of defense, and possibly a moral code in cultural activity in keeping with democracy. The attackers of the new-wave, however, have all along accused it of being "hegemonic," as if it is they who truly need tolerance:

> "Should we allow Misty poems to exist?" My answer is, "Of course we should." Not only that, our Shikan has even published a couple of them … But the question now is not whether we allow you to exist but whether you allow us to exist. The argument that tries to negate the realist tradition of our new poetry has already emerged.[25]

And the accusation has been reiterated all these years. Last year the new editor of *Shikan* burst out with great anger:

> The new-wave poetry has never made itself into one center of polycentrism. Revolutionary poetry is not only disqualified to be the core of Chinese poetry, it is even disqualified to be one center of polycentric coexistence. Indeed it is even not acknowledged as poetry …. This is a posture—"I kill you or you kill me" (you wo wu ni, you ni wu wo).[26]

The two sides both shout "Tolerance!" and accuse the other side of being in tolerant. How could it be that the bare fact, as plain as the nose on one's face, could be so differently interpreted? Of the poems published in every one of the last fifteen years, the overwhelming majority are propaganda poems or commercialized sentimental poems not in the vein of the new-wave. Even less are those anthologized or granted a prize. If we calculate critical essays on poetry published every year, the situation is basically the same. Xie Mian was certainly right when he said, "Chinese poetry of recent years has worked a miracle. It has turned itself into an 'Exhibition of Poetry' (shige bowuguan)."[27]

7

But this exhibition is certainly not an example of tolerance. I have to say that Ke Yan and others are perfectly justified in feeling that they are being sidelined and squeezed out of the center. Not because new-wave poetry is of higher artistic quality (for which different people may have different standards) but because new-wave poetry and new-wave criticism have indeed become "hegemonic" in a particular field. This field is academia.

Misty poetry and post-Misty poetry are both academic poetry, and new-wave criticism an academic school of criticism.

The participants-the poets, the critics and the readers-are either college teachers or students. Indeed in the beginning post-Misty poetry was called, in 1984, the "School

of Students" (*Daxuesheng Shipai*).[28] The fact that most of the Misty poets are not college graduates was only a folly of that particular time.

I do not think that academia plays a similar role in all modern societies.[29] But in China some modern intellectuals withdraw from the structure of state power into academia, which poses as uncompromisingly critical not only of state power but also toward the scienticism and commercialism that dominate society. Therefore, the hegemony over civil society, as defined by Gramsci, appears split in modern China,[30] with part of the intellectuals no longer acting as "deputies" of the socially dominant group,[31] but as its critics.

What makes the situation most interesting is that in China today academia seems to hold the sway over literature as well as most issues of humanities, and determines its value-judgment and meaning-construction. State domination and the other parts of the hegemony may try to wrestle this power from academia, but not always with success.

8

With this understanding in mind we can proceed to examine the question of the so-called bogus modernism (*jia xiandaipai*) or premature literary Avant-Gardism (*wenxue chaoqian*) that has long been giving a serious headache to the cultural study of contemporary Chinese literature.

These "-isms" are misleading in that they look as if they are imported from the West and not produced by Chinese culture. Since Chinese society is still basically an underdeveloped one which is perceived to be a favorable climate for Avant-Gardism, the accusation of blindly following the fashions, and old ones at that, of the West seems to be well-grounded.[32]

But we have to remember that although the country may be economically or even culturally underdeveloped, the campus is not. For, in defiance of the rest of the society, academia has created a localized cultural climate that is capable of breeding Avant-Gardism. The situation seems to be a variation of the traditional elitism and stratification in Chinese culture.

It was during the May Fourth Movement that Chinese intellectuals for the first time formed the core of Chinese cultural criticism in academia, and Chinese poetry was for many years a typical academic poetry. For of many reasons (which can hardly be reviewed in this short paper), the power of academia spilled over into the political movement, and eventually succumbed to political command. For the greater part of the twentieth century, academia was only part of the state apparatus, and intellectuals were made into deputies of the dominant group. The final split came as a dramatic reaction to the Cultural Revolution which was the most drastic effort to eliminate academia, but only served to re-awaken it. Chinese intellectuals, at least the part most concerned with culture, split from the state domination and resumed, in the milieu of academia, the independent power of meaning-construction. And the earliest and most conspicuous part of this Big Split was new-wave poetry and new-wave criticism.

This academic privilege of meaning-construction means the power to write a cultural history. If the poetries endorsed by the State or by the society are unable to win over academia, they lose position in history no matter how successfully they

promote their own poetry.[33] Ke Yan and others are certainly not crying wolf. Once the academic "argument" is emerging, tolerance is no longer relevant.

9

But why does academia prefer new-wave poetry to other kinds of poetry? What makes them match?

The relationship between academia and the rest of society looks very similar to that between new-wave poetry and the rest of the language. The latter could be taken as a metaphor of the former, or the former as a confirmation of the latter. If normality has to be maintained to facilitate the scientific and practical use of language, poetic language, though only a foregrounded tip, is an utmost necessity so that language does not deteriorate through overuse. The same can be said about academia. If normality (or stability, to use the catch-word in China now) has to be maintained in order to facilitate the shift toward commercial society and the material welfare of the people, academia and its uncompromising criticism is an utmost necessity in order to curb the spiritual and cultural deterioration, and to help the eventual re-orientation of Chinese culture.

The antagonistic confirmation between new-wave poetry and language, or the critical compensation between new-wave criticism and culture, form a dynamic paradox that exercises an irresistible pull on all the texts of the culture. Here lies the ultimate hope. Here lies the opportunity for history to gyrate out of the shape of a nebula.

Notes

1. James Legge, trans., *Chinese Classics*, Vol. I: *Confucian Analects*, Bk. XVIII, Yang Huo (Oxford University Press, 1893), P. 323.
2. Ibid., p. 315.
3. The first three chapters of *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragon* are entitled respectively "Yuan Dao" (On Dao the Source), "Zheng Sheng" (Evidence from the Sages), and "Zong Jing" (Esteem for the Canons).
4. Cao Pi, "Lun Wen" (A Discourse on Literature) in his *Dianlun.* This declaration was praised by Lu Xun as the first Chinese exposition of art-for-art's-sake. (Lu Xun, "Wei-Jin Fengdu Ji Wenzhang Yu Yao Ji Jiu Zhi Guanxi," *Lu Xun Quanji* (Beijing, 1973), 3, 490.
5. The definition of pure poetry offered by the British aesthetician A. C. Bradley is more useful to our discussion than other definitions, not so much for the definition itself but for his way of defining.
6. Sun Shaozhen, "Xin de Meixue Yuanze Zai Jueqi" (A New Aesthetic Principles Is Rising), *Shikan* 3:56 (1981).
7. "Feifei Zhuyi Xuanyan" (The Manifesto of No-no-ism), in Xu Jingya et al., eds., *Zhongguo Xiandai Zhuyi Shiqun Daguan* 1986–1988 (Shanghai: Tongji University Press, 1988), pp. 33–35. Or please refer to the statement of the one-man "Wu-pai" (No school) in the same book (P. 305) which envisages "No exists as a gigantic being. But the only being is no."
8. Xie Mian, "Meili de Dunyi" (A Charming Escape), *Wenxue Pinglun,* 2:28–35 (1989).

9. Xu Jingya, "Guinie Zhi Si" (The Death of Criterion), *Yalu jiang* 7:68–77 and 8:70–77 (1988).
10. This is Han Dong's speech on the Canal Poetry Forum (*Yunhe Shihui*) held in 1988. The speech, though quoted by many, was never published.
11. Wang Gan's comment is interesting. "Bei Dao and co. were always saying 'This is what life should be.' But the fifth generation all shout, 'This is what life should not be.'" (Wang Gan, "Xiri de Zhuangji" [A new turn for better], *Dangdai Wenyi Tansuo* 6:67 [1987]).
12. Xu Jingya "Guinie Zhi Si" (The Death of Criterion), *Yalu Jiang* 8:74 (1988).
13. Some examples:
    "What we are concerned with is poetry itself, is poetry as poetry." ("Manifesto of They," in Xu Jingya et al., eds., *Zhongguo Xiandai Zhuyi Shiqun Daguan,* 1986–1988, P. 52).
    "The eternity and loftiness of poetry lie in its incessant reduction of human existence into a state of purity." ("Manifesto of Totalism," Ibid., P. 130).
    Or, to quote Hu Dong: "As a pure art of language, poetry is a complete confidence in language." ("The Poet's Fight with Language" [Shiren Tong Yuyan de Douzheng, Ibid., p. 219).
14. Huang Ziping, "Xiaoshuo Yu Xinwen: Dangdai Zhongguo de Zhishi, Wenhua, Quanli yu Meijie" (Fiction and Journalism, Knowledge, Culture, Power, and Media in Modern China), *Ershiyi shiji* 5:136 (1991). The denunciation by critics not in the New-Wave Criticism school is much harsher. Gong Liu, for instance, declares "Pure poetry is only a fabrication, a pure phantasma in the mind of some poets." ("Cong Sizhong Jiaodu Tan Shi Yu")
15. Xie Mian, "Kongjian De Kuayue" (The Leap Over Space), *Wenxue Lilun Yanjiu* 5:40 (1987).
16. Pierre Macherey offers an interesting description of the "muteness" of the literary text:

    > "What is important in the work is what it does not say. This is not the same as the careless notation 'what it refuses to say'… what the work cannot say is important because there the elaboration of the journey is acted out, in a journey of silence." (Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall, [London, 1978], P. 86).

17. The New Traditionalism (*Xin Chuantong Zhuyi*) is different from other "culture poetry" in that it acknowledges that the "meaning" expressed is false. "In a sense, the new traditionalists share the same fate with explorers, paranoiacs, drunkards, hysterics, and fabricators of modern fables. They live in vulgarity while marching toward the wilderness of imagination. The sun scorches down on the old birth-mark on their belly." (Xu Jingya et al., eds, *Zhongguo Xiandai Zhuyi Shiqun Daguan, 1986–1988*, p.145).
18. Julia Kristeva, for one, argues in explicit terms for the impure purpose of critical interpretation:

    > "There are political implications inherent in the act of interpretation itself, whatever meaning that interpretation bestows …. To give a political meaning to something is

> perhaps only the ultimate consequence of the epistomological attitude which consists, simply, of the desire to give meaning." (Julia Kristeva, "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," in W.J.T. Mitchell, ed., *The Politics of Interpretation* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982], p.84.) This is why she holds that "the apogee of the obsessive quest for A Meaning" is political interpretation (Ibid., p. 84).

19. Perhaps only Xia Zhongyi made a clear-cut observation about the ideological commitment of the New Wave Criticism:

> "On the one hand, the New-Wave Criticism endeavors to make literature independent from politics. On the other hand, the New-Wave Criticism itself has to rely on the 'openness' of politics. The result is that the more it is obsessed with the aesthetic nature of art, the more it involves itself in the political struggle." (Xia Zhongyi, "Lishi Wuke Huibi" [There is no avoiding history], Wenxue Pinglun 4:18 [1989].)

20. Quoted by Ke Yar in "Guanyu Shige de Duihua" (Dialogue About Poetry), Hongyan 4:182 (1983).
21. Ibid., p. 181.
22. The "Three Rises" (*Sange Jueqi*) are three of the most attacked essays of New Wave Criticism. They are: Xie Mian, "Zai Xinde Jueqi Mianqian" (Facing the New Rise), *Guangming Ribao*, 7 May 1980; Sun Shaozhen, "Xinde Meixue Yuanze Zai Jueqi" (A New Aestheic Principle Is Rising), Shikan 3 (1981); and Xu Jingya, "Jueqi de Shiqun" (The Rising Generation of Poets), Wenxue Lilun yanjiu, 1983.
23. Xie Mian, "Zai Xinde Jueqi Mianqian."
24. Xie Mian, "Kongjian de Kuayue," p. 41.
25. Ke Yan, "Guanyu Shige de Duihua," p. 181.
26. Yang Zimin, "Bawo Fangxiang, Zai Shidai de Haiyang Shang Polang Yuanhang" (Control the Direction and Sail Swiftly on the Sea of the Era) Shikan 7:60 (1991).
27. Xie Mian, "Kongjian de Kuajyue" p. 43.
28. Xu Jingya et al., eds., *Zhongguo Xiandai Zhuyi Shiqun Daguan 1986–1988*, p. 186.
29. In many Western countries academic poetry is generally synonymous with conservativism in poetry, but academic criticism is most probably the strongest bastion of cultural opposition, as Julia Kristeva observes:

> "Academic discourse, and perhaps American university discourse in particular, possesses an extraordinary ability to absorb, digest, and neutralize all of the key, radical, or dramatic moments of thought, particularly a *fortiori*, of contemporary thought. Marxism in the United States, though marginalized, remains deafly dominant and exercises a fascination that we have not seen in Europe since the Russian *Proletkult* of the 1930's. Post-Heideggerian 'deconstructionism,' though esoteric, is welcomed in the United States as an antidote to analytic philosophy." (Kristeva, p. 83).

She uses a sarcastic word "neutralize" for the academic obsession with critical thought. But this apparent neutralizing is essential for academic criticism to play its cultural role. The recent American official attack on the pressure of

"political correctness" created by academia has proved that this neutralizing has a sharp cutting edge.

30. Antonio Gramsci tries to distinguish between the "hegemony" that controls the civil society as contrasted to the "direct domination" of the State:

> "What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two major super-structural 'levels': the one that can be called 'civil society,' that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private,' and that of 'political society' or 'the State.' These two levels correspond on the one hard to the function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised through the State and the 'juridical' government." (*Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Q. Hoare et al. [London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971], p. 12).

31. In the same passage by Antonio Gramsci: "The intellectuals are the dominant group's 'deputies' exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government." (Ibid., p. 12.)
32. Shen Zeyi, "Dedao de Yu Shiqu De," *Wenxue Pinglun* 2:104 (1989).
33. A conspicuous recent example is the "fever" of Wang Guozhen (who writes sentimental romantic poetry) whipped up by the officially-controlled mass media. This success proves that academia is influential only with a small part of the audience. But the fact that the fever had to be promoted in a commercial manner also spells the power of academia over value-judgments in literature.

Chapter 13
Fiction as Subversion: Yu Hua

Yu Hua seems to have had almost no apprentice period: when he emerged around the end of 1987, he already had all the marks of a writer of excellent caliber the two stories he published in September that year, "Leaving Home at the Age of Eighteen" (Shiba Sui Chumen Yuanxing) and "April 3rd Incident", have already his unique style and themes. A few months later, in January 1988, when *Xianshi Yizhong* (A Kind of Reality) was published, the slow-moving Chinese critical circle was finally awaked to a new reality in Chinese literature. Even if Ge Fei, Su Tong, Sun Ganlu, and other "second-generation" avant-garde writers had not emerged almost at the same time. Yu Hua could have made 1988 a bumper harvest year for Chinese fiction.

The avant-garde fiction that emerged in China in 1986 marveled many observers by its rapid changing of leading voices. Can Xue seemed to be the dominating star for several months before Mo Yan took over and made his name almost a household word. In early 1987 critics felt that they could talk about Ma Yuan for many years to come, only to find themselves lost again when a whole generation of new writers arose toward the end of the year, and they had to invent the self-apologetic term *post-new-wave.*

There is an obvious difference between the writers who emerged before 1987 and the new group, whatever we call them. The pre-1987 writers more or less belong to the generation of the "rusticated youth", for whom the Cultural Revolution is a childhood nightmare destined to haunt their whole life. Mo Yan, the youngest among them, was born in 1960. Can Xue's *Huangni Jie* (The Muddy Street), Ma Yuan's *Shangxia Dou Hen Pingtan* (Flat Up and Down), or Mo Yan's *Wu Meng Ji* (Five Dreams) are telling proof of this, but the Cultural Revolution lurks behind most of these writers' other works that do not deal with the subject overtly.

This is not the case at all with the second-generation writers, who were all born in the 1960s and are too young to remember anything about the Cultural Revolution, which began in 1966. Even when they do occasionally write on the Cultural Revolution, as Yu Hua did in his ghastly *Yijiu Baliu Nian* (Nineteen Eighty-Six), the events depicted seem to be pointing toward something beyond the horrifying experience

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Y. Zhao, *The River Fans Out*, China Academic Library,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6_13

of that particular national tragedy. it would be unnatural for them to have an obsession with the Cultural Revolution. Perhaps because of the enthusiastic promotion of magazines like *Zhongshan* (Purple Mountain) in Nanjing and *Shouhuo* (Harvest) and *Shanghai Wenyi* (Shanghai Literature) in Shanghai, the majority of this second generation of avant-garde writers are based at the Yangtze Delta, the culturally most advanced area in China. The most militant apologists for avant-garde fiction among Chinese critics, them selves not much older than the authors whose writings they discuss and promote, are working in this area. I have not yet found the cause for this geographic concentration, but these writers and critics constitute the first avant-garde school in China, one which promises the greatest achievements in the history of modern Chinese fiction.

It seems to be almost impossible for any new writer to distinguish himself against the background of such a dazzlingly bright galaxy, but Yu Hua has done it. This young writer, hardly thirty years of age, already possesses a proud record of twenty or so most interesting stories and short novels. Since 1987 he has been producing consistently at the speed of more than one story or short novel every season. Even though "A Kind of Reality" is still his best work, he has convincingly demonstrated that he is maturing as a writer with each new publication and is destined to occupy a long page in Chinese literature.

Born in 1960 in the small town of Haiyan in Zhejiang Province, Yu Hua must be constantly aware that the great pioneer of modern Chinese fiction, Lu Xun, was his fellow provincial. "Among all the New Wave writers, or among all Chinese writers today", the young critic Li Ji (who is now in prison) commented in the summer of 1988, "Yu Hua is a most representative inheritor and developer of the Lu Xun spirit". At the time this comment sounded like excessive praise. Today, when we recall it, it hits the nail on the head. An understanding of Lu Xun is the key to interpreting Yu Hua, and understanding Yu Hua provides a new dimension for the study of Lu Xun.

As I see it after a careful study of Yu Hua, the central issue in Lu Xun's fiction is his anxiety regarding the unavoidable crisis of the meaning-constructing systems in Chinese culture, which has no choice but to go for modernization. In this crisis the irrefutable reality confirmed by the rational rigidity of traditions is, as he sees it, rotten throughout whereas what the traditional values view as aberration, fantasy, or even madness are openings to a reorientation of the whole culture. We can see in Lu Xun's works the almost self-destructive desire for reevaluating meaning-construction (A Madman's Diary), the deplorable absence of any meaning-power in the collective numbness (A Public Example), and the dramatic antagonism created by the strain inside the meaning-constructing systems (The Constantly Burning Lamp).

Yu Hua, likewise, seems to be obsessed with the interchange between different constructions of meaning, especially that between fantasy and reality. With Lu Xun, the two sides are divided by the gap between the old and the new: the new is always weak in appearance but more powerful in truth value, and it commands our sympathy. With Yu Hua, however, the antagonism is formed by the real and the unreal: the latter is weaker yet more real than the real, though not necessarily commanding our sympathy. Reality in Yu Hua's works appears so flighty that it is more insubstantial than fantasy, and the reality in fantasy is more verisimilar than the actual reality,

if any exists. What is more, the new is to be confirmed by history whereas the unreal results from an interpretive effort of meanings and is frustratingly subjective. The confrontation between the real and the unreal, then, can be boiled down to the objective and the subjective methods of meaning-constructing.

In Yu Hua's earliest works this "subjective" approach is, by and large, a self-centered way of experiencing the world. Yu Hua seems to be especially preoccupied with the tormenting uncertainty experienced by youngsters when they must face adulthood. In "April 3rd Incident" the young male protagonist, after leaving high school before his eighteenth birthday, finds that everyone—his parents, his former classmates, the girl he loves, and all the people around him—harbors hatred toward him and employs all kinds of methods and agents, including little children, to keep watch over him and subject him to impending persecution, which, he is made to believe, will occur precisely on April 3rd. Extremely worried, he envisages, in a series of dreams or daydreams, strange situations in which he becomes entrapped. These events then actually occur one after another, making reality a materialization of imagination. In Sect. 16 of the novel the boy experiences a flight of fancy in which four former classmates abduct him from his bed and set him in the center of the street to let a car run over him. Two sections later some people really do come and knock at his door.

> He thought for a while, then resolutely threw the door open Who should be standing there but Zhang Liang and others. They all burst into loud laughter at the sight of him and swarmed into his room.
>
> He did not bat an eyelid, though the scene was too similar to what he had dreamt last night…
>
> He said, "I have not yet brushed my teeth". The moment he had spoken that, he was astonished at himself. He had involuntarily repeated the words he had said in his dream.[(i)]

Reality in Yu Hua's works, it seems, is not a mechanical repetition of imagination but a transfiguration, or rather a translation without grammar. This is exactly the reverse of "realist fiction", which claims to translate reality into imagined discourse. Reality seems only to give imagination a more tangible existence. The chain of events does not stop there, however, as reality reacts on imagination and is re-translated into it and finally confirmed by it. Thus reality itself is reduced to a mere link in the nightmarish chain The boy in "April 3rd Incident" realizes that what he has to do is smash this vicious circle so that he can break free from the persecution.

> After that it should be the knocking at the door. But the knocking should come after he has risen from the bed. Though two other things had been confirmed, he still doubted whether the knocking would really come. He lay in bed, reluctant to rise In fact he wanted to sabotage the possibility of hearing the knocking Should it really come, he would prefer to hear it while in bed. (31).

As he is always hearing people hinting vaguely about some ineffable incident being planned to take place on April 3rd, he decides, the night before, to escape by climbing onto the coal wagon of a train, gleefully imagining how his parents will be punished for their failure of vigilance. Paradoxically, his escape itself becomes the "April 3rd incident", thus confirming once more that his imagination has a undeniable truth value beyond his control.

If in this long story the motivation for a different system construction is psychological (the boy's persecution complex), then in the short novel "The Ephemeral World" the cause of the mutation between reality and imagination is to be found in the dark, grotesque, necromantic activities of the Chinese subculture, the darkest corner of the Chinese mentality: "sexual nutrition" (*caiying buyang*), marriage after death (*minghun*), child abuse, the sustenance of the aged at the expense of others, etc. All these elements are knitted into a complex network wherein the mutation between reality and fantasy moves in step with the switch between life and death and between tragedy and farce. Sordid crime reigns everywhere, and the ultimate motivation is self-interest, victimizing children and women.

Hanging over another of Yu Hua's short novels, "Fate Is Inescapable", is the horror of death. This work is hardly an illustration of the Buddhist idea of *jie*, as all the characters fall into fate's trap because of the evils that beset modern society: vanity and jealousy. The few couples in the novel all end up destroying each other. The father of the ugly Lu Zhu gives her a bottle of nitric acid when the handsome young man Dong Shan proposes to her.

> What she saw was Dong Shan's image, maimed, floating one piece after another from the liquid. The scene was really too gory to watch. But it dispersed the anxiety in her mind, and she came to know that the bottle in her hand was the guarantee of her future happiness.[(ii)]

So, on the night of the wedding she pours the acid on her bridegroom's face. This fantasy-reality mutation rebounds on the other half of the relationship. The beau Dong Shan, after becoming disfigured, begins to nurture sexual fantasies about the nudes on a pack of playing cards. When Lu Zhu poses seductively in front of him, he sees something so true to his fantasy that he can no longer bear it. So he kills her to complete his fantasy.

If in "Fate Is Inescapable" it is apparent madness that strangles reality, in "1986" the cause of the murderous madness is traced to the cruelty that marks China's entire history. A timid primary-school teacher who is an amateur historian interested in the subject "torture in Chinese history" is arrested during the early years of the Cultural Revolution but manages to escape, only to become deranged due to his long exile Twenty years later, in 1986, he comes back to the small town where he once lived and taught. Everyone there is busy with his or her trivial pursuits. His wife has remarried and cannot recognize him, and his daughter does not know her father. They feel only a nondescript consternation when approached by this disfigured beggar of a man. Totally ignored, he is haunted by the tortures he once studied and fantasizes about subjecting the callous people around him to these horrors. Finally he actually starts to practice those tortures on himself with a rusty handsaw: cutting off his nose, excising his calf, castrating himself, and dismembering his body in a lingering execution. In a series of sanguinary scenes his fantasized madness takes the form of real madness, and history reaches into the cruel present.

Fantasy, madness, and death seem to be discursive activities that unfold on a temporal axis. So is narrative. Only in narrative does the temporal linearity of a work of fiction separate cause from effect and assume a logical rigidity. However, if reality is said to be not distinct from imagination but is only another interchangeable version

of it, then there should not be a rigid temporal scheme to place them in consecution, as the temporal-causal sequence is only an order imposed upon the narrated world. To break free from this rational tyranny, a more malleable time is called for, and in Yu Hua's fiction the effort is displayed as a series of temporal dislocations.

Chen Xiaoming once summarized the frequently encountered time scheme in avant-garde fiction in the formula "Many years ago—many years after".[(iii)] He holds that this is not only the product of the characters consciousness but also "the judgmental statement of the outcome of the story". If so, the flash-forward in avant-garde fiction, as in traditional Chinese fiction, is used predominantly to show how the outcome is predestined, whether by fate or by ethical codes. In Yu Hua's works what we see in the flash-forward scheme are not illustrations of predestination as the final cause but rather of the repetitiousness of life, the re-tractability of time, which, pushed to an extreme, shows itself as a non-temporal evolving of events. "Fate Is Inescapable" seems to comprise a series of such flash-forwards. On the surface the device is used to emphasize the ineluctability of fate, but the story actually reminds us continually of the temporal network that, by consistently repeating itself, sucks everything into it: "In between Dong Shan's visits, her vision penetrated the endless drizzle outside the window and she saw her wedding with him. At the same time she saw the scenes when she was cast aside. Her vision stayed there a long time" (FI, 66). This kind of flash-foward is not so much a prediction of the outcome of the story as it is a device to show that a vision is not much different from an event. What the girl sees here is not only an imagined scene but a definite occurrence, though it has not yet materialized.

In some of Yu Hua's works, such as "April 3rd Incident", this reversibility imposes a pause upon the narrative, and time assumes a corporal existence that can come into interaction with the characters: "The past years have already gone by but the days ahead have not yet started to act. Lying on the bed, he seemed at a loss what to do. But he already saw a boy off, and he would go the opposite way… That boy was himself, was his past self" (A3, 66). As if to compensate for this non-temporal treatment, Yu Hua's narrative is full of minutely detailed description. The concreteness of imagination cannot be compared with that of reality, for the latter possesses an existential tangibility; but when the two become interchangeable in the narrative, the distinction melts away. Thus, in a girl's vision about her own death, the seemingly trivial details become significant.

> When Cai Di walked out of the alley, she got the last impression of life. She saw a broken bicycle leaning on a cement pole. The sun shone on the wheels, and she saw the rust spots on them. For a moment she felt the sunshine was also full of rust spots.[(iv)]

With such a wealth of details, imagination assumes a corporeality more persuasive than reality. Since the changes in imagination are never bridled by common knowledge, the details in imagination provide ample support for the substantiation of changes. The midwife in "The Ephemeral World" hears her heart croak like a frog, and the blind man who loves a girl hears her voice go through a physical change.

> At that time he heard her first cry, which, it seemed, came breaking out from her chest, mixed with the sound of splitting. The cry was sharp, but it broke into pieces once outside the door.

> When the sound arrived at the blind man's ears, it was already fragmented. What the blind man caught was only one piece of it.(v)

What shocks readers most in Yu Hua's fiction, however, is the detailed presentation of violence and cruelty, as in the scenes from "Fate Is Inescapable" in which Lu Zhu destroys her husband's face with nitric acid (70), Guang Fo kicks to death a six-year-old child who happened to see him making love (69), and Sha Zi watches a lady vomit all over herself (74). Similarly, in "The Ephemeral World" we see the decomposition of the corpse of a midwife (74), read of people callously imagining how Cai Di thrust the dagger into her own body stroke by stroke (75), and hear a girl describe how she saw a lady jump from a high building and crash to the ground (82).

Many of Yu Hua's characters enjoy torturing other people. In "Fate Is Inescapable" Sha Zi regards cutting a girl's pigtails as a form of art, and Sen Lin's way of avenging himself against the world is to slash women s pants with a knife. In "A Kind of Reality" the young protagonist strangles his baby cousin "just to enjoy the explosive crying"(vi). In "1989" the schoolteacher seizes every chance to exhibit how he mutilates himself, as if deriving a sense of relief from doing so. The most shocking description of cruelty, however, is found in "A Classical Romance", where a woman and her daughter are both stripped for showing to customers who pay cash for human carcasses during a famine year. When the daughter is bought by the customers, they demand "live meat".

> The woman pleaded:
>
> "Please have mercy and kill her first".
>
> The owner of the store said:
>
> "No. The meat cut in this way would not be tasty".
>
> … The chopper fell with violent force, and with a crack the bone was severed, and blood spurted all over the store-owner's face. The child screamed.(vii)

In "A Kind of Reality" cruelty becomes a kind of biting satire. The body of the protagonist, after the autopsy, is dissected by a group of merrily chitchatting medical doctors from different departments. The lady dermatologist, for instance, having skinned the protagonist's body thoroughly, "folded it like a coat and left" (24).

Cruelty, nevertheless, is not present just to shock readers. It is a distillation, a to-the-marrow summary of history. It is the opposite of what is recorded in official history, with all its accounts of the glory and pomp of the dynasties to the victimized and the forgotten such as the schoolteacher in "1986", history comprises an endless stream of cruelty without redemption. In "Wangshi Yu Xingfa" (The Past and the Penalty) history, or remembrance of the past, is marked with nothing but different ways of torture and execution.

> He tore 9 January 1958 into pieces flying like snowflakes on winter days. He subjected I December 1967 to castration. As he cut down the two heavy testicles of that day, there was not a shred of sunshine, though the moonlight that night grew like weeds. 7 August 1960 was not able to escape from its predestined fate. He used a rusty saw to cut that day in half at the waist. But the most unforgettable date is 20 September 1971. He dug a deep pit

> on the earth and buried that day alive until only its head was above the ground. Because of the pressure of the earth, blood rushed to its head. Then Penalty Specialist smashed its head and immediately a column of blood appeared. The fountain of 20 September was just splendid.(viii)

This was the same view on the history of China that made the May Fourth pioneers shudder. Lu Xun once commented, after quoting passages of cruel torture and execution from history, "No wonder some softhearted people do not like reading unofficial histories or listening to [historical] stories. Some events do not seem to be occurrences in a human society. They would hurt your heart beyond cure".(ix) When the most sublime halo is seen only as the reflection of the knife, and the cruelty executed "in the interests of history" is found to be only blind killing, history is then stripped of its supreme meaning and power.

Being the most powerful genre in the discursive hierarchy of Chinese culture, history is naturally the first and foremost target in Yu Hua's parodic subversion. Not only history, but other kinds of culturally honored discursive systems, especially Chinese ethics, are parodied relentlessly as well. The central issue in the Confucian ethical canons—filial piety—is reversed in "Xibei Feng Huxiao de Zhongwu" (The Noon When the Northwest Wind Is Whistling), one of Yu Hua's earliest stories, wherein a thug kicks open "my" door, drags "me" to a funeral to be the mourning son, and forces "me" to perform filial duty to an unknown old woman for years to come. In "The Ephemeral World" a ninety-year-old fortune-teller prolongs his own life at the expense of five of his sons, who die one by one, and sexually abuses little girls in order to draw the essence of life from them. The professional mourner, a sixty-year-old woman, sleeps with her grandson and gets pregnant. Another character sells his six daughters, and when the last one commits suicide, he bargains to get the best price for selling her soul. This is a culture where the rights and even the lives of the young are ruthlessly exploited to feed the old and the dying.

If "1986" and "The Past and the Penalties" are anti-history and "The Ephemeral World" is anti- "Scripture of Filial Piety" (Xiaojing), then "A Kind of Reality" is a scathing satire on the Chinese myth of family, where every nuclear family hates all others so intensely that they cruelly kill one another in a feud inside the big family. The purpose of such killing seems to be to deprive one another of the great aim of life for Chinese families: to beget sons. The end of the story, where everyone has been annihilated by mutual revenge, serves as a devastating irony.

> The most successful part of Shangang's body seems to be his testicles. The urologist transplanted them on a young man whose own testicles were crushed in a car accident. Soon after that the young man got married, and his wife became pregnant immediately and gave birth to a very healthy son This is totally out of the expectation of Shangang's sister-in-law, who had him sentenced to death only to do him a great favor—he now had a son to carry on his lineage (25).

Several recent works by Yu Hua have turned to a more profound meta-fictional dimension that we may call generic parody. "Hebian de Cuowu" (Mistake over the Riverbank) from January 1988 can be read as a parody of detective fiction; "Gudian Aiqing" (A Classical Romance, December 1988) is a parody of the talent-beauty novel; "Xianxue Meihua" (Plum Flowers of Blood, March 1989) parodies

the martial-arts novel. All these are sub-cultural genres that have been extremely popular for centuries. Their history honored conventions naturalize the narrative and provide a powerful verisimilitude that forces readers to suspend their disbelief. The conventions that are seemingly followed so strictly in Yu Hua's works ultimately turn on themselves and destroy the generic illusion.

Unlike Cervantes, who subverted the chivalric romance by carrying its generic conventions to a ridiculous extreme, Yu Hua's parodies employ understated irony, which uses the conventions in a respectful, solemn way but also deprives them of their motivation, especially the ethical motivation, thus exposing their vulnerability. "Mistake over the Riverbank" has an intriguing plot that is common to all works of detective fiction. A series of cruel murders following a similar pattern are committed on a riverbank. An engineer happens to be an unwitting witness each time, which puzzles the police detectives and eventually drives the engineer mad. He tries to shut himself up but has the presentiment that he is going to witness yet another murder. Finally he tries to break the evil chain of fantasy-reality mutation by killing himself, but the police investigation aimed at discovering the truth is stopped by his action as well. The detective novel is considered by many critics as the best embodiment of positivism literature,[(x)] with its causal chain of motifs carefully preserved throughout the narrative and everything brought to light by the end of the text. In "Mistake", however, the cause-effect chain is discovered but also found to be totally irrelevant to the murder. Distressingly, innocence and guilt are confused in the process of fantasy-reality mutation. When sheer madness kills reality, the genre is emptied and ridiculed.

"A Classical Romance" exploits the conventions of the talent-beauty fiction that dominated Chinese literature for many centuries. There exist in the story all the necessary elements for the traditional romance: the aspiring young scholar preparing for his civil-service examination, the young lady in the boudoir who falls in love with the young scholar at first sight, the more-than-enthusiastic maidservant, the backyard garden in full bloom. All the elements are there but without their original meaning, since the young scholar is not at all torn between his ambition or his filial duty and his romantic passion, as he seems to take none of them to heart, regarding them only as inevitable aspects of his life. The lady does not show any sign of love-sickness as death approaches during the famine years. As expected, the grand finale involves a reunion: the young man's devoted love over the course of many years (a recurrent motif in Chinese classical romance), though lukewarm, brings his beloved back to life, only to let her leave him yet again.

A more thorough generic parody is "Plum Flowers of Blood", whose hackneyed title makes it sound like a vulgar piece of martial-arts fiction. Avenging the death of one's father, the noblest motivation for action in that sub-genre and one which could compel a swordsman to devote his entire life to hunting down the killers, is strictly followed in this story, but the original murder fails to kindle any spark of hatred for the killers in the young man's heart. He is forced to embark upon the life of an avenger because conventions (at least generic conventions) require him to do so. After spending many years on the road, he feels that the hard life of wandering is quite to his taste, and he does not much care what he is looking for; he even seems

to put off his revenge involuntarily. When he finds that he has unwittingly brought death to his enemies, he feels sad that "the lovely wandering with no aim is now coming to an end".(xi) Revenge without hatred, executed via conventions but without motivation, turns the story into a dejecting process of desemanticization.

What we have here, then, are stories that satisfy all the normal requirements of their respective sub-genres but are deprived of their normal meaning: that is, they are detached from the metalanguage, the necessary code that normally conveys the moral message of the story. In this way the generic requirements sound not only awkward and stiff but unreasonably superficial as well. The subversion of genre produces a subversion of values, since the codes for guided interpretation are mainly ethical codes. The values found in the Chinese subculture almost completely mirror those of the mainstream Chinese culture. The Chinese subculture, like that in many cultural systems, has no independent value system. What is more, the strict adherence to conventions in the sub-cultural genres lends a certain rigidity to those values. That is why to subvert those conventions it is imperative to subvert those values. In "Plum Flowers of Blood" the mother burns herself in the house in order to make the son resolute on the road of revenge. This self-sacrifice to the value system, after the desemanticization of the latter, becomes not only unnatural but horrifyingly immoral.

Among the avant-garde writers today, Yu Hua seems to be the one most interested in the meaning-contructing systems in Chinese culture, and also the one who shows the strongest awareness in subverting them it is this awareness that enables Yu Hua to return to the May Fourth writers and to surpass them. It is none other than this spirit of cultural criticism that makes it possible for him to bring into the foreground several important issues in the reorientation of Chinese culture. Not long ago most Chinese fiction writers were still refusing to go deeper than the thematic level in criticizing this or that social phenomenon through their plots. Yu Hua is an author who goes directly for the metalanguage, for the meaning-contructing systems that control the interpretation of cultural discursive activities. In his works the leaves and branches are no longer the main concern, and subversion is a radical treatment that needs no apology.

Notes

(i) Yu Hua, "Siyue Sanri Shijan" (April 3rd Incident), *Shouhuo*, 1987, no. 5, p. 40. Subsequent references use the abbreviation A3, when needed for clarity.

(ii). Yu hua, "Jieshu Nantao" (Fate Is Inescapable), *Shouhuo*, 1988, no. 6, p. 66. Subsequent references use the abbreviation FI, where needed for clarity.

(iii) Chen Xiaoming, "Hou Xinchao Xiaoshuo de Xushi Bianzou" (The Narrative Variation of Post-New-Wave Fiction), *Shanghai Wenxue*, 1989, no. 7, p. 69.

(iv) Yu Hua, in *Shouhuo*, 1988, no. 6, p. 81.

(v) Yu Hua, "Shishi Ruyan" (The Ephemeral World), *Shouhuo*, 1988, no. 5, p. 81.

(vi) Yu Hua, "Xianshi Yizhong" (A Kind of Reality), *Beijing Wenxue*, 1988, no. l, p. 5.

(vii) Yu Hua, "Gudian Aiqing" (A Classical Romance), *Beijing Wenxue*, 1988, no 12, p. 12.

(viii) Yu Hua, "Wangshi Yu Xingfa" (The Past and the Penalty), *Beijing Wenxue,* 1989, no. 2, p. 37.
(ix) Lu Xun, "Binghou Zatan" (Random Talk after Disease), in *Lu Xun quanji* (Complete Works of Lu Xun), Beijing, Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1957, vol. 6, p. 133.
(x) See Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice*, London, Methuen, 1980, p. 68.
(xi) Yu Hua, "Xianxue Meihua" (Plum Flowers of Blood), *Renmin Wenxue*, 1989, no 3, p. 69.

Chapter 14
Ma Yuan, the Chinese Fabricator

Ma Yuan's sensational writing career was cut short in early 1989, five years after his first publication. We do not know yet whether it was because he left Tibet and returned to his hometown in Liaoning Province, or because of the drastic change in the cultural atmosphere in China. For whatever reason, he discontinued his meteoric career in a manner similar to his novels and stories: the narrator just quits with the story half told and the plot line dangling in suspense. Soon he was no longer seen in the literary circles of that province, and nobody seems to know his whereabouts, though hearsay about his doing some odd business in a Rimbaldian way in this or that remote region has never ceased. Nevertheless, even if he succeeds in holding himself back from writing for the rest of his life (which is very unlikely for this super-active mind), his stories and novels from the years 1985–89 mark a crucial change in the development of Chinese fiction and still deserve critical reinterpretation.

When, in August 1984, Ma Yuan published his first story, "Lasa He Nǚshen" (The Goddess of the Lhasa River), in the local magazine *Xizang Wenxue* (Tibetan Literature), he emerged as a puzzle to most critics and readers. This was not due to the fact that his name was new. In the post-Mao years the Chinese reading public had been accustomed to seeing the sudden beam of new stars, and the critics had been proud of themselves for making discoveries. It was rather because the story was too innovative, too different from any fiction works previously produced in China. Critics sensed that the story was not merely a daring gesture with no substance, but they were unable to point out exactly where its merits lay. In appearance, the story, a rather short piece, looks like notes about some unconnected events randomly thrown together. Several Lhasa artists go for an outing to a suburban island in the Lhasa River. They see the corpse of a pig washed down the river. They have a picnic. They meet some Tibetan girls doing laundry. One of them tells a hunting story. They chat about making a sculpture of the goddess. The whole text makes no effort to give the events a tangible sequence, let alone a meaningful plot.

Still, "The Goddess of the Lhasa River" made for intriguing reading and possessed a special charm. Perhaps because critics thought that it was only a fortuitous occurrence, a chance performance that would not be repeated, the discussion, at one time

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Y. Zhao, *The River Fans Out*, China Academic Library,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6_14

heated, soon died down. But before long, this highly original author produced even more challenging works and thus forced the critical circles to give his unique fiction serious consideration.

Ma Yuan was born in 1953 in the city of Jinzhou in northeastern China (Manchuria). He spent about ten years in the countryside as a rusticated youth and as a factory worker during the Cultural Revolution and did not have an opportunity for a proper education until quite late. Upon graduation from the Department of Chinese at Liaoning University in 1983, he volunteered for work in Tibet. But his job with Tibetan Radio required too little of this tall (6'1"), dynamic young man's energy. Though he must have been writing in his earlier years, it was only in Tibet that he found the necessary impetus.

Ma Yuan's short novel *Gangdisi de Youhuo* (The Lure of the Gangdisi Mountains), published in January 1985, forced critics to discuss his fiction seriously for the first time. The novel, establishing the young author as a pioneer of Chinese vanguardism, was a milestone marking the rise of avant-garde fiction in China, but in 1985 he was not understood as such, as he was indeed ahead of his time. Instead, he was thought to be a new "roots-seeking" author or was labeled as a Chinese magic realist. With his tremendous productivity, however, he made the interpretation of his works a formidable task and effectively taught the critics a new language for dealing with him. Following "The Lure of the Gangdisi Mountains" came the novella *Xihai de Wufan Chuan* (The Boat Without Sail on the Western Sea 1985), the story series *Die Zhiyao de Sanzhong Fangse* (Three Ways of Folding a Paper Kite, 1985) and *Lasa Shenghuo de Sanzhong Shijian* (Three Kinds of Time Living in Lhasa 1986), the novella *Xugou* (Fabrication 1986), the novel *Shangxia Dou Hen Pingtan* (Flat Up and Down 1987), and the story"Cuowu" (Mistakes 1987), among other works.[(i)] By the end of 1987 this new author, pushing aside the literary stars that appeared before him, had succeeded in becoming the most talked-about writer in China.

Some critics think that Ma Yuan had not fully matured as a writer before his 1986 novella "Fabrication". Others think that the long story "Jousi" (Old Death) and the story series "Lasa de xiao nanren" (The Little Man in Lhasa) in 1988 brought his writing career to its real zenith. All these comments are true in a certain sense, since he continually renovated, expanded, and varied his narrative art. Nevertheless, there is something consistent running through Ma Yuan's works which lifts him above the wave upon wave of rising new stars in recent Chinese literature. Although he writes about the lives of young people sent down to the countryside, his writing does not belong to the "rusticated youth" school of fiction, for he does not care much about that generation's typical laments concerning wasted years of rural labor. Although his works are mostly set in Tibet, he cannot be considered a chronicler of Tibetan life, for his use of Tibetan loci is so superficial and casual that Tibet is only the convenient anchorage of his fiction rather than an object of observation. Some critics argue that his works are imbued with a sympathy for human suffering, yet he is not fundamentally concerned about humanitarian issues in society. What makes him unique is something beyond themes or subject matter.

Ma Yuan's works strike the reader, first of all, with a complex interweaving of the narratorial voices, never seen before in Chinese fiction. In "The Goddess of the Lhasa

River" three characters, one after another, tell stories that have no obvious connection among them, thus forming several parallel narrated worlds, each anchored in its own narrative time and space. In "The Lure of the Gangdisi Mountains" many characters join in the narrating, each in his particular way, but not in the manner we usually see in a multi-perspective narrative, where different characters are used to recount the same plot line from various angles. This new device, as the narrator confesses in "The Lure of the Gangdisi Mountains", is used "to break down the continuity of readers' thoughts".[ii]

In what is apparently Ma Yuan's first novel (though published much later, in 1986), *Haibian Yeshi Yige Shijie* (It Is Another World on the Seashore), two characters appear as narratorial surrogates who are to reappear in many of his subsequent novels and stories: Yao Liang and Lu Gao. Lu Gao is a tall, robust young man with an unkempt beard, a man of adventure, a great friend of dogs, reticent but resolute and even cruel when it is time for action (an image bearing a striking resemblance to Ma Yuan, or at least to what he appears to be). In contrast, Yao Liang is a contemplative young man, fond of thinking and musing, taken to writing essays on philosophy, an "affectionate lover" as Lu Gao derisively calls him (an image that could possibly be the real Ma Yuan). The two characters seem to form what critics call a "pseudocouple",[iii] representing the two halves of a single persona who sometimes appears in Ma Yuan's works, calling himself "I" but Seeming rather a ghostly presence. In "Flat Up and Down" he even appears together with Yao Liang and Lu Gao, surprisingly calling himself Ma Yuan. He explains: "Only three survived those years in the countryside: Yao Liang, Lu Gao, and me. I do not count. So only two survived".[iv] And in "The Lure of the Gangdisi Mountains" the "I" comes to ask Lu Gao to join in the exploration.

> We have known each other for more than ten years. It's not a short period of time. I have never said anything flattering to you. Now I have come to ask for a small favor. I said what I said because you refused to open the door Perhaps you think that I am another Yao Liang. What if I were! I am not, though (*Gangdisi* 191).

In other cases the two friends Lu Gao and Yao Liang join efforts to challenge the first-person narrator, engaging him in debate, teasing him, and sometimes pushing him aside by taking over the narrative role. Or, at times, the two even introduce each other as the author, as Yao Liang tells us: "Let me reveal the truth: Lu Gao is no other than Ma Yuan himself, who tries to wear a more pleasant mask" (*Gangdisi* 282). Even without this fictional identification, however, the three seem to form a perfect trio, with Lu Gao as the active experience, Yao Liang as the quiet meditator, and "I" or "Ma Yuan" as the unperturbed observer. Modifying and interacting with one another, they make the narrative text more complicated than a conventional narrator can handle.

With such a complex distribution of subjectivity, many of Ma Yuan's fictions resemble a kaleidoscope in their dazzling shifts of narrative voices. In the first section of "The Lure of the Gangdisi Mountains", for instance, "I" comes to Lu Gao's house in the pouring rain, but soon another character tells his own story in the first person, and then yet another character takes over and tells the story of his friend, a Tibetan

hunter, which is followed by a story told from Lu Gao's point of view but by an implicit narrator. In this way the novel proceeds with unrecoverable fragmented narrative subjectivity. Since, it seems, any character can pick up the narratorial voice at any time, there is no single authority to dominate the narrative text. Instead, the characters sometimes even acquire sufficient authority to argue and debate with the main narrator. As a result, the text seems to be immersed in a broadly participatory effort of fiction-making.

Another salient feature in Ma Yuan's works is the strong narratorial self-consciousness, never seen before in Chinese fiction. The narrator in Ma Yuan's works is fond of making the statement that he is only "narrating a story", not telling the truth, and he does not mind taking the trouble to remind the narrate, "This story is not easy to narrate" or "It is better for this story to end here". Occasionally he is even quite proud of being dishonest: "If I am to tell nothing but the truth, I can only say something about him before he was seventeen years old when he was meek and timid like a girl",(v) "I am going to present to you the last part of my fabrication. Let me tell you in a whisper: in it are all my sorrow and all my pride".(vi) The purpose of the narrator's flaunting of dishonesty is to deprive the reader of any possible sense of verisimilitude: "Like many storytellers, I have the fear that you may become serious about my story" ("Fabrication" 67).

The self-exposure is sometimes taken to such an extreme that the characters step forward to blame the narrator for telling lies about them. In Sect. 23 of "The Lure of the Gangdisi Mountains" the character Yao Liang states:

> Mr. Ma Yuan has never been to No-Man's Land in western Tibet. I can provide telling evidence. None of the details in his novel are true. It is exactly because of this that he plays with the form of fiction so that the readers can hardly distinguish between truth and falsity (282).

When a narrator is reprimanded by a character he has supposedly created, the order of the narrative world is turned upside down. Nothing then remains reliable in such a text. What is left is mutual falsification between the narrators and the characters.

On the other hand, interestingly enough, Ma Yuan's works often give a strong feeling of the absence of narrative mediation, as if everything recorded in those texts were factual events, and as if the narrator had not made any modifications in copying the records into the fictional texts, not even the sequence of events. Since the usual role assigned to the narrator—to control the narration—seems to have been abandoned, he now looks more truthful than the narrator in more conventional fiction.

In some of Ma Yuan's works, certain details are given in a "scientific" style. In "The Goddess of the Lhasa River" the island's longitude and latitude are given and a menu is provided to show that an outing really took place on that particular day. In "The Lure of the Gangdisi Mountains" the description of the characters' foiled attempt to watch the Tibetan sky burial is so meticulously detailed that it sounds like a traveler's notes.

Thus there is an apparent contradiction in Ma Yuan's fiction: the factual "reportage" tone and the lack of structuring in the plot emphasize the verisimilitude of the narrative, enabling the reader to believe in it, even as the narrator's repeated

warning that everything is fictitious in the narrative distances the reader. For instance, in the story "Siwang de Shixue" (The Poetics of Death) the narrative proceeds in an almost pseudo reportage manner. There is even a long statement emphasizing the factuality of the text: "The reason I start the story from the end is partly because the event itself finished long ago. It is different from those stories whose events are occurring while the narration goes on. The possibility of the story has been exhausted or almost exhausted".(vii) On the same page it is declared, however, that nothing is real in the story.

> The sudden incident drives Li Ke into my fictional world. This is his fate. And I, being the author of this story, naturally want him to enter this world in a conspicuous manner. Therefore I choose him to be the suspect in the murder.

It can be argued that since the events are rendered in their natural, "unmediated" state, the narration is only an effort to relate what has to be related, and its possible distortion of facts can therefore be overlooked. If so, the verisimilitude produced by the narrative should be strengthened. On the other hand, it can be argued that since the whole narrated world is declared a mere fabrication, the impression of the events' being real is only the result of a suspension of disbelief. The two do not contradict each other, since the verisimilitude is created on the narrated level while the statements negating that verisimilitude are on the narrating level. Instead, the two mix to produce a paradoxical but significant tension. That verisimilitude must be more real than reality, for it has stood the challenge of the narratorial falsification The story "The Old Death" is typical of how the authenticated and the falsified are mixed. About the young protagonist's rape of his sister, we read:

> One report says that the incident took place at the end of May. Another says that it was two or three days after Children's Day. The date may not be very important. Anyway, it happened when summer came to the Northeast.
>
> Some say that it happened at night. Some say that it was in the morning. Still others say that it was during was in the morning. Still others say that it was during nap time after lunch. If I could fabricate a horror story, I would let it happen in the time between midnight and early morning.(viii)

Different statements are quoted as to how the rape took place, step by step. For instance, four different versions are provided about the single detail of how the young rapist sneaked into his sister's room. It all sounds like the report of a police investigation, and the narrator, being extremely particular about the authenticity of the report, simply refuses to pick and choose. At least that seems to be his intention. After much hesitation, the narrative proceeds very much like regular fiction, until finally the narrator says: "The one thousand characters following 'He came into the room' constitute the version most wide spread at the time, and the most accepted in the neighborhood as well" (29). This is how the fabrication, once falsified, gives the narrative text a quasi factual status. With the narrator freed from the responsibility of mediation, the narrative text becomes the ultimate reality that can be found.

To reinforce the impression that the narrative comprises real facts, many of the episodes recounted simply have no conclusion. The suicide commit ted by the old man in "Fabrication" seems to be the result of a secret about to be discovered by

the narrator-protagonist, but the text ends here without the narrator's finding it out. "I don't expect miracles neither do I shun miracles if they come my way", is his explanation (50). Of course, even in a chaotic heap of *objets trouvés* narrative mediation remains, and the narrator still must make a selection from what is at hand for him to use. Selectivity is the precondition of any narration. However, if the narrator convinces the reader that he only picks indiscriminately whatever comes his way by chance, the last vestige of narratorial mediation seems to be re moved from the text.

Such selectivity-erasing randomness is most typical in "The Lure of the Gangdisi Mountains", which comprises three parallel plot lines, none of them reaching a conclusion: the account of a group of friends traveling to see the Tibetan sky burial with no success, a veteran writer's bear story, and the tale about the Tibetan brothers Dondrup and Donyo. The same structure—multiple unfinished plot lines—appears in Ma Yuan's other two novels, "The Boat Without Sail on the Western Sea" and "Flat Up and Down". The author himself declares that he sees life as an eternal failure to achieve closure: "Sometimes I prefer incompletion… I feel strongly that I am pulled to a final conclusion but I fail to reach it. I know that the final conclusion can hardly be reached. So I have already given it up".[(ix)]

Because the events are randomly selected, the connection between them fortuitous, and the plot lines fragmented and incomplete, all we find in Ma Yuan's works is a bewildering collage. Juxtaposition usually induces a metaphorical relationship hidden behind seemingly unrelated things, which could help build a sense of totality. In Ma Yuan's collage, however, even this vague and dubious relationship is annihilated, and every event, however casually and incompletely narrated, is self-sufficient and self-completed on its own, not dependent on other events to form a causal, temporal, or spatial network in order to determine its position. Fortuity then reigns in the narrated world, and the binarisms of past/present, here/there, and self/other turn out to be only human efforts to reorganize the world. As we were warned, the only possible logic in this narrated world is fabrication, and nothing but fabrication.

That is why, I think, the narrator in "Fabrication" emphasizes repeatedly that the events in his narrative do not "happen", they merely "exist" (49). There then appears a fundamental irony in the whole narrative, and the potential verisimilitude it-self becomes part of the irony. False/true, the most important binarism of realist fiction, is out of the question, as not only the authentication but also the falsification proves to be a falsity. What is left ruling the whole narrated world is the uncertainty principle, which should be considered an extreme form, an outrageous avant-garde variation, of narrative unreliability. The narration is shown to be unreliable by nature, and that unreliability itself is universalized as the law that governs everything relating man to the world. This absolute uncertainty of narrative finally leads to the nullity of any interpretive effort. The overall falsification precludes the possibility of a secured meaning, and it seems that the only meaning which can be drawn from this extremely unreliable narrative is no meaning at all.

Some critics hold that sex and death are the two major concerns of Ma Yuan, since many of his fictional works apparently deal with them (e.g., "The Poetics of Death", "Fabrication", "Mistakes", "Old Death"). Yet the narrator in Ma Yuan's fiction seizes every opportunity to emphasize that what he is interested in is no love story. In "The

Lure of the Gangdisi Mountains" the character Lu Gao finds himself in love with a beautiful Tibetan girl who, without the narrator's giving us any presentiment, dies in an accident even before the main story takes off. Both sex and death are swallowed up in the overall accidentally-of-life narrative.

In Ma Yuan's earliest works there are often emotional cues for the expected interpretation. In the short story "Xiawa, keshi… Keshi" (Eva, but… but), for instance, the boy who tells of the accidental death of a girl has himself fortunately just survived a disastrous earthquake. He declares in one moment that his is a true story, but in the next moment he states that it is not true when he sees the sad response on the face of the girl narratee. So the true/false switch is subjective, depending on the acceptance of the receiver.

Soon, however, even this subjective indication is renounced. Ma Yuan says after publishing "The Goddess of the Lhasa River": "I tried my best to write as objectively as possible—to describe objectively, and to reflect my subjective experience (including my own observations) objectively. For this purpose, I have to discard any psychology about the activities of human consciousness".(x) With their infrequent use of psychological or emotional elements, Ma Yuan's works acquire a sort of classicist austerity in style and in tone.

The meaning of the text is the result of an operation on the meta-lingual level. To foil the meta-lingual control, Ma Yuan's fiction seems to work entirely on the surface of events. In this way the text ceases to be a signpost pointing to any implied meaning. Events, then, become things-for-them-selves, as Ma Yuan writes in the seemingly innocent prefatory poem to the novel "Flat Up and Down": "I clearly remember/that on the dike/the three-colored marble/as free as ever". The impenetrability of the narrated world is the precondition of the existence of the world. From here Ma Yuan comes to his own version of pantheism, very similar to the Taoist understanding that ultimate truth exists everywhere, with ants, with excrement.(xi)

If there is meaning in Ma Yuan's works, it is not lying behind the text waiting to be extracted or interpreted. On the contrary, it lies within the text, within the very narrative form. The content is a formalized content. In Ma Yuan's fiction the turning of the contents into narrative form is no longer a theoretical speculation. The conclusion of "The Lure of the Gangdisi Mountains" can be taken as an example. As the story of the Tibetan brothers Dondrup and Donyo comes to an "end", the text reads:

> A remaining question Suppose Donyo comes back, what would happen between him and his sister-in-law? How to account for the motivations of the three persons?
>
> The question is a matter of narrative technicalities.
>
> All right, let us have a look.
>
> First of all, Donyo will not and cannot come back. With this possibility excluded, the question is much simpler—He died not long after he enlisted in the army. In order to console the bereaved mother, his squad leader voluntarily took up his role as the son, and sent nearly two thousand yuan in her son's name And then—
>
> But should there be a "then"? (177–78)

Here the discussion of form is inseparable from the narration of events, and the inclusiveness is not only the state of the events but also the requirement of the narrative form. In this way, the narrated and the narrating become one, and reality part of fiction.

Ma Yuan seems to take much pride in playing with fictitiousness, as could be seen in the dedication of "Fabrication": "All gods are blindly complacent in the same way…. Let's take the myth of genesis, for instance. Their method is exactly the same—namely, repeated fabrication" (48). For Ma Yuan, then, writing fiction is no less enjoyable than playing God. He once confessed that he often started a story without conceiving the whole plot and would create the fictional world as he went along, often incorporating the creative effort into the created World. Thus every time he wrote something, he lived one more life.[(xii)] "The Western Region has be come a symbol, a void, where no one cares for either the truth or falsity" (*Gangdisi*: 184). And so has his fiction.

When Chinese fiction rose anew from the ruins of the Cultural Revolution, it did not find its old obsession with truth—which had been borrowed from nineteenth-century Western literature—out of date. Realism remained the foundation of art and literature. It was not until the mid-1980s, when avant-garde fiction (the first such movement in the history of Chinese literature) emerged, that Chinese literary circles realized that fiction not only could be fabricated but could also be about fabrication itself. The new school brought drastic changes which altered the development of Chinese fiction for good. With a series of stunning fabrications of genuine originality, Ma Yuan was the one writer who turned the page that not even the pressures exerted on Chinese fiction in recent years could turn back.

Notes

(i) English translations of Ma Yuan's works are unduly rare, mainly because, I think, English translators are slow in following the rapid development of Chinese literature. By the time they "rediscovered" Ma Yuan, he had already dropped out of the literary scene. Among the works listed above, the novella "Fabrication" and the story "Mistakes" can be found in *The Lost Boat: Avant-Garde Fiction from China*, ed. Henry Y. H. Zhao, London, Well sweep, 1993. In fact, the majority of Ma Yuan's works in Chinese remain uncollected. His earlier works can be found in his only collection, *Gangdisi de Youhuo* (Beijing, Zuojia Chubanshe, 1989), a pocket-size book in the "Library of New Writers". Many of his works are locatable only in back issues of Chinese literary magazines.

(ii) Ma Yuan, *Gangdisi de Youhuo* [The Lure of the Gangdisi Mountains], Beijing, Zuojia Chubanshe, 1989, p. 283. Subsequent references use the parenthetic designation *Gangdisi*.

(iii) Guy Christian Bemard, *Samuel Beckett*: *A New Approach*, New York, Dodd, Mead, 1970, p. 90.

(iv) Ma Yuan, "Shangxia Dou Hen Pingtan" [Flat Up and Down], *Shouhuo* [Harvest], 1987, no. 5, p. 133.

(v) Ma Yuan, "Cuowu" [Mistake], *Shouhuo*, 1982, no. 1, p. 4.
(vi) Ma Yuan, "Xugou" [Fabrication], *Shouhuo*, 1986, no. 5, p. 68. Subsequent references use the parenthetic designation "Fabrication".
(vii) Ma Yuan, "Siwang de Shixue" [The Poetics of Death], *Shouhuo*, 1988, no. 6, p. 118.
(viii) Ma Yuan, "Jousi" [The Old Death], *Zhongshan* [The Purple Mountain], 1988, no. 2, p. 28.
(ix) Ma Yuan, "Guanyu Gangdisi de Youhuo de Duihua" [Dialogue about "The Lure of the Gangdisi Mountains"], *Dangdai Zuojia Pinglun*, May 1985, p. 34.
(x) Ma Yuan, "Wode xiangfa" [My Thoughts], *Xizang Wenxue*, 1985, no. 1, p. 23.
(xi) "He said he is a pantheist. He believes in the relative epistemology shared by Zhuanzi and Einstein, but he also believes in absoluteness above all relativities". Zhou Dao, "Yiwei shou pinglun jia guanzhu de zuojia" [A Writer Who Attracts Much Critical Attentional, *Wenyi Bao* (Beijing), 25 March 1987.
(xii) Ibid.

Chapter 15
A Fearful Symmetry: The Novel of the Future in Twentieth-Century China

1.

Throughout the history of Chinese literature there have occasionally appeared works that could be classified as utopian fiction. But prior to the twentieth century there had never been utopian narrative of the future. In this article I show that this is highly significant.

Of its nature, any utopia[1] must be separated from "reality" and realization while at the same time being accessible by appropriate imaginative means. The conventional construct of the separation is spatial rather than temporal—an imagined society coexisting in critical and dangerous contrast to our own. Access to it can be thus achieved only through a journey of adventurous fantasy across the separation of space, a key feature to all such fictions. Authors and readers, who do not have the fortune of access, can only experience the adventure in narrative.

Nevertheless, there emerged later a sub-genre of utopian novels in which the separation is temporal: stories that take place in the future. The "novel of the future" seems to be a primarily Western initiative. When speaking of the Chinese "novel of the future", the reference in the title to the twentieth century is redundant, for there had been no such novels in China in any earlier period. The imaginative crossing of temporal barriers may seem easier than the crossing of spatial ones: all that is required is that a certain amount of time elapses before the designated future arrives. But in fact the crossing takes a greater feat of imagination, which was why the novel of the future appeared close to the modern times in the West, and much later in China.

For, in contrast to the infinite amount of information we can discover about past events, we know absolutely nothing about the future, however near it is to the present, making any prediction a risky business. This extreme asymmetry is the greatest fear in human experience.

The genre of the novel of the future, sometimes called the "speculative novel" in Western critical circles, builds its accessibility to the "uchronia" on the general social acceptance of the directionality of history. The narrative of the utopian novel traces

[1]Some critics take care to distinguish between *utopia* and *dystopia*, though many fantasies may well have characteristics of both. In the present paper I shall make no distinction.

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Y. Zhao, *The River Fans Out*, China Academic Library,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6_15

things that should have been *déjà établi*, which results in a kind of self-contradiction, since its critical spearhead is directed towards the future.[2] In this sense, the novel of the future—utopia with a historicity—could be regarded as a more genuine kind of utopian novel.

In traditional Chinese thinking, there had been little conceptualization of the directionality of history. It was towards the end of the nineteenth century that the idea of progress was imported from the West. This was precisely why the novel of the future did not emerge in China until the early years of the twentieth century.[3] A similar sequence of events took place in the West: there had been very few novels of the future until the Age of Enlightenment when the idea of the progress of history gradually became the consensus among the educated.[4]

The paradox lies in the fact that, although a glimpse into the future is made possible only by the directionality of history, once the goal of history is part of the exclusively ruling ideology—the Grand Utopia—no other speculation about the future is needed or tolerated. Future is in such cases incompatible with fiction—it is now a matter of social praxis, with no room for imagination. The seemingly strange fact that the novel of the future was produced in China only in the first and last decades of the twentieth century can only be explained in that way.

Karl Mannheim argues that utopia is structured in a similar way to ideology—they are both unreal—whereas their functions are diametrically different: utopia aims to change the present social status quo while the function of ideology is to consolidate it. Mannheim might have neglected the fact that any ideology must have some utopian elements, while social reality is bound to be barren and harsh, incapable of winning the loyalty of the masses. An effective ideology, even one that aims purely to consolidate the social order, has to promise a spiritual or material paradise. This is all the more so in modern times when progress is the strongest mandate to rule. Nevertheless, once the promise is in the process of being carried out, when the ruling Grand Utopia is no longer to be reached in the imagination but is being implemented, it could lead to horrifying disasters, among which the denial of other imaginative utopias is only the most trivial.

However, as I shall try to illustrate in this article, such deprivation of imagination is not as inconsequential as it appears.

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[2] Karl Mannheim in Bryan S. Turner (ed.), *Ideology and utopia* (London: Routledge, 1979), 23.

[3] The Gongyang School of Confucian Classics of Han Dynasty insisted on a kind of regression of history, which was developed by Shao Yong (1011–77 A.D.) in his *Huanji Jingshi* into a regressional historical view of four sages: those of the Sages, of the Emperors, of the Kings, and of the Despots. But since history had long degenerated into the Age of the Despots and stagnated there, there was still no directional development to talk about.

Bulletin of SOAS, 66, 3 (2003), 456–471.© School of Oriental and African Studies. Printed in the United Kingdom.

[4] According to Ignatius Frederick Clarke's *Tale of the future, from beginning to the present day, 1644–1976* (London: The Library Association, 1978), apart from a slightly fictional political pamphlet in 1644, the earliest future novel in English was published in 1733, which describes the Europe of 1977, in which Islam has been wiped out, the Jesuits control Italy, and the English rule Russia.

2.

It was the concept of progress, the most important element in the Chinese understanding of modernity, that led to the rise of the novel of the future in China.

The first Chinese novel of the future, and indeed the first major work of twentieth-century Chinese fiction, was Liang Qichao's The future of new China (Xin Zhongguo Weilai Ji) which was serialized in the influential magazine New Fiction (Xin Xiaoshuo) under the author's own editorship in 1902. Liang's unfinished novel ignited an explosion of novels in the last ten years of the Qing Dynasty, of which the novel of the future was one of the major genres. My rough calculation finds over thirty novels of the future published in the first decade of the century, a surprisingly large number considering the limited number of titles printed in those early years of the Chinese publishing industry.

Because of the retrospective nature of narrative, the narration of the novel of the future has to take place in the future to the future. This feature is brought to the fore when the novel has an over-narrative framework where the narration apparently takes place.[5] From where had Liang learned this new genre with its complicated narrative-time loop?[6] Literary historians often mention the Japanese novel *Plum Flower in the Snow* by Suehiro Tetcho and the American novel *Looking Back* by Edward Bellamy. My supposition is that he might have drawn his inspiration from another work, the science fiction novel *The End of the Earth* by a French astronomer-novelist,[7] which Liang himself had translated and serialized concurrently with *The Future of New China*. That seemed completely natural since the progressiveness of history, in the post nineteenth-century Chinese mindset, was derived from the definitive "progressing" nature of science.

Historically speaking, scientific knowledge seems to be straightforwardly accumulative: those who come later know more and understand better than their predecessors. This is why "pure" science fiction is, generally speaking, hardly "utopian": there is little risk in predicting that a certain technique could be available in the future. In Western literary criticism the "speculative novel" aims mainly at describing social conditions in the future and is distinguished, and dealt with separately, from science fiction. Although the works in the two sub-genres overlap a great deal and hardly any novel of the future is purely scientific or exclusively social, the difference is very clear.

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[5]For the rapid development of the technique of handling narrative time in Chinese fiction of the early twentieth century, please refer to my discussion in *The Uneasy Narrator: Chinese Fiction from the Traditional to the Modern* (London: Oxford University Press, 1995), 131–170.

[6]In fact the time structure was too complicated for Liang the politician-turned-novelist—the narrator has to tell his story from the future of the future, since narration, by definition, is telling something that has already happened. At the very beginning of his novel, it is said that "In the Year 2513 After the Birth of Confucius, that is, the year 2062 in Western Calendar", Dr Kong gave a lecture recalling the progress of Chinese Reform during the last sixty years. Obviously he meant to say 1962 instead of 2062. Liang not only made a mistake with the "Western Calendar", but also with the "Confucian Calendar" which the Reformists insisted that China should adopt.

[7]The author's name is only given by Liang in Chinese characters, from which I have not been able to trace the French original, nor have other scholars.

One theory of science in particular—Charles Darwin's evolutionist biology—provided the idea of historical progress with a "scientific foundation". Yan Fu's 1897 translation of *Evolution and Ethics*, Thomas Henry Huxley's pamphlet of 1891, is rendered in elegant classical Chinese but gives a fairly accurate presentation of the basics of evolutionism. The translation sent a thrill through the whole nation, and its impact throughout the twentieth century could hardly be exaggerated. Not strange at all, Chinese readers have hitherto neglected Huxley's discussion of why natural selection does not apply to "ethical" human society. Yan Fu's translation of Herbert Spencer's works on Social Darwinism was published in the same year. However, by reading Huxley the Chinese literati had already formulated their own interpretation, which could perhaps be called Nationalist Darwinism. Liang himself acknowledged that he read Yan's translation before it was published and recommended it enthusiastically to all Reformist leaders.[8]

In 1905, the Manchu government, under immense pressure from within and without, began reforming China's education system and drafting the first constitution. The last decade of the Qing Dynasty was indeed a period of forward-looking excitement. People of varying political views envisaged different futures and wanted to give their predictions more vivid descriptions in fiction. The majority of those novelists, however, were so eager to put forward their message in predicting China's future that they failed to take good care of narrative art.

The best known of these novels, *The Future of New China*, is also typical of their failings. It starts with the success of Reform in China which, it is reported, has gone through six periods of struggle and is brought about by the competition between three great political parties. It takes five chapters of the novel, however, before the protagonist arrives at the eve of the founding of the first political party, where Liang's writing of the novel halted abruptly. Liang, the leader of the Reformist Movement, had to turn his attention to more urgent political issues.[9] Ironically, many other Late Qing novels of the future even repeated this self-truncation. The few novels that were completed offer very sketchy descriptions of the future. A re-reading of such novels is rather boring if one is not interested in that era of literary history.

Nevertheless, these novels, put together, form a formidable body of work and deserve the kind of scholarly attention that has hitherto been lacking.[10] This has

[8]Please refer to Ouyantg Zhesheng, Y*an Fu Pingzhuan* (A Critical Biography of Yan Fu, Nanchang: Baihuazhou Wenyi Chubanshe, 1994), 71–74.

[9]Most of Liang's biographers hold that Liang had to take up more urgent political activities: he sailed the Pacific on a fund-raising trip to the United States for the Reformist Movement. I would venture to say that there is a lack of basic craftsmanship of the structure of the novel: the pace of the first five chapters is indeed too slow. For further discussion of this technical problem, please refer to my discussion in *The Uneasy Narrator*, 151.

[10]In his remarkable book *Fin-de-siècle Splendor, Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1848–1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), David Der-wei Wang devotes a whole chapter to what he calls "science fantasy". His discussion is highly interesting and is a must-read for researchers on this topic. But he emphasizes more the scientific ideas in the configuration of Chinese modernity, while the present article attempts to view those works as utopian/dystopian representation of the drastically changing Chinese mentality of that turn of the century. Our discussions are complementary.

resulted in some ignorance of the genre on the part of contemporary Chinese authors and critics. For instance, the author and publisher of a recent novel of the future *The Gate to Doomsday* (Mori Zhi Men), published in Beijing in 1995, claimed that the novel was "the first novel of the future in the history of Chinese fiction",[11] totally neglecting late Qing novels of the genre. This mistaken statement, however, also testifies to the fact that the re-emergence of the Chinese novel of the future in the 1990s was not a continuation of the "tradition" of earlier in the century: the trend has a different cultural dynamic.

3.

With the rise of Modern Chinese Fiction in the second decade of the twentieth century, the novel of the future suddenly vanished in China. From the May Fourth Movement in the mid-19l0s to the end of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1980s, Chinese society moved on more rapidly than the imaginations of novelists. For much of the twentieth century, "Scientific Socialism" (which is the name Marx himself preferred for his doctrine and which was more than happily accepted by Chinese Marxists, most of whom started out as Social Darwinists) dominated China. Progress was upheld as the basis of the entire value system and the future the ultimate confirmation of its mandate. The goal, and the course as well, was unchallengeably predetermined. Then the Utopian future no longer needed imagination to access it, as social reality itself was pregnant with the future: the separation between the utopia and the reality had to be scaled with power but not imagination.

However, it is unfair to place the blame for the ruthless implementation of utopia on Communism. Various other attempts at practicing utopia had been tried in China prior to this: e.g., the "New Village Movement" brought in from Japan by Zhou Zuoren, and the "Work-Study Co-operative Movement" preached by Cai Yuanpei, President of Beijing University. This was perhaps why there was not a single novel or story of the future produced during the entire May Fourth Movement.

Although fiction is often regarded as a linguistic challenge to the cultural status quo, when praxis is pregnant with the future, fiction could only "reflect" the futurity of the praxis. Here comes the defense for "socialist realism", a kind of writing that denies the privilege of imagination.

Only when the directionality of history is generally recognized, but no "Grand Utopia" dominates society, is there room for the imagination feeding the novel of the future. This seems to apply in other nations too: E. I. Zamiatin's novel of the future, *We*, could only appear in the early years after the October Revolution. After the Soviet regime consolidated itself there were very few novels of this genre.

No wonder that for eighty years after the rise of Modern Chinese Fiction, not only was there no novel of the future in China, but even science fiction became so banal that it was very little removed from popular science. There were only two utopian novels that were generally known: Lao She's *The City of Cats* (Mao Cheng Ji) of 1930, and Shen Congwen's *Alice in China* (Alisi Manyou Zhongguo Ji) of 1931.

[11] Zhou Zhengbao, "*Mori Zhi Men Yinxiang*"(My Impression of The Gate to Doomsday), *Xiaoshuo Pinglun.* No. 3, 1996, 47.

These two novels were criticized as reactionary in both form and content, and the two authors would suffer greatly in later years.

Even such rare utopian novels were possible only in the early 1930s, before Communism won enthusiastic support among Chinese intellectuals. After that, no fictional utopia was possible in China for over half a century. One of the very few exceptions was the 1958 film Fantasia on the reservoir (Shisanling Shuoku Changxiangqu). I am unable to recall any piece of propaganda art as boring as this "fantasy", produced at the peak of the frenzied and disastrous implementation of the Maoist romantic Grand Utopia, i.e. during the so-called Great Leap Forward. But even that was too bold an effort. From then until Mao's death, the novel of the future was completely out of the question.[12]

During the 1980s, however, a number of new schools and trends emerged in Chinese art and literature. Many of them attracted the accusation that they were only imitating what Western artists and novelists had done before. But there was no novel of the future in China in the 1980s even though it had been an important genre in modern Western literature. In 1985, George Orwell's 1984 was published for the first time in China and won great acclaim among readers, but it did not stimulate any response until the 1990s.[13] Indeed writers of Chinese fiction—the self-respecting ones—never imitate western fiction blindly: there need to be particular Chinese reasons for anything Western to take root in Chinese soil and eventually blossom.

In the 1990s there finally came the second flourishing of future novels in China, with many works that warrant scholarly attention. Feng Jicai's *Eve in the Last Days* (Mori Xiawa) could be said to be a new type of Chinese science fiction, sounding a warning against the unrestrained progress of technology. Jia Pingwa's *Smoking* (Yan), a religious novel of the future, tells of the strange previous life and the after-life of a tobacco-addicted soldier.

Since I can only choose a few representative novels to discuss here, many works are mentioned only in footnotes. The novels I am going to focus on are Wang Lixiong's eco-political novel *Yellow Peril* (Huang Huo), Liang Xiaosheng's social-satirical novel *Floating City* (Fu Cheng), Qiao Liang's espionage thriller *Gate to Doomsday* (Mori Zhi Men), Hong Ying's feminist trilogy *Far Goes the Girl* (Nuzi Youxing), and Wang Xiaobo's sexual fantasy series *Silver Age* (Baiyin Shidai). The first three try to foresee possible social-political changes in China, while the last two seem to attempt a rehearsal of the impact of the future on human conditions in general.

4.

Liang Xiaosheng's *Floating city*, written at the end of 1991 and published the following year,[14] was the first novel of the future produced inside Mainland China. Though there is no mention of the year in which the story takes place, there are scenes

[12]The only future novel I can find is Lin Yutang's Looking beyond (1955), which was written in English and published in the United States. It can hardly be counted as a piece of Chinese literature.

[13]Wang Xiaobo openly acknowledged his indebtedness to 1984, and wrote, in his future novel 2010, "The novel was banned, but there are so many hand-written copies that every girl student of the Technical College has one". But Wang did not write future novels until the 1990s.

[14]Liang Xiaosheng, *Fu Cheng* (Floating City, Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe, 1991).

in the novel of citizens looting bookstores of their copies of *Calamities in 1999* in order to understand the situation they are facing, apparently in the titular year.

At dawn a Chinese coastal city, where two million people who have just spent a night indulging in every possible type of sin, finds itself split from the continent and floating in the sea. With that stunning discovery, the mob takes to looting and humiliating the Communist cadres. They set the airport on fire so that no one can escape the common fate. To regain control of this increasingly ruinous anarchy, the mayor decides to declare that the city is floating towards Japan. The good news calms everybody, and the people start to make the city squeaky clean in order to be welcomed. Nevertheless, when they get close to Japan, the city is stopped by an ice-wall erected by a new Japanese invention, "electronic cold".

The novel satirizes all kinds of social trends, especially the emigration frenzy that gripped China during the 1980s and reached its peak in the early 1990s. The city's floating away is reminiscent of the emigration by force in *Yellow Peril*. But while it is engendered by a kind of "national salvation" in that novel, in this it is spurred by sheer greed.

The tone of the narrative, increasingly bitter when it sneers at the cadres, bears a striking resemblance to the satire of the bureaucrats in Late Qing novels. However, *Floating City* spares no one: neither the *nouveaux riche*, the fashion-chasing women, the demagogic student leaders, nor the common people. The few good people all die miserably, as if the city does not deserve them. The group interest splits the city's population into three factions: the anti-Japanese "Red Star", comprising cadres who fear losing their power, in alliance with the rich who have too much Chinese money which, not being a hard currency, cannot be converted to Japanese Yen; the pro-Japanese "Rising Sun"—mainly the working classes seeking to earn higher wages in Japan for their labor; and the "New Commune"—idealist Marxists among the students. The three factions carve up the city, and soon a civil war using modern weaponry and technology is in full swing. When the Chinese fleet finally arrives, most of the people refuse to be rescued as they believe the city is now floating towards America. In the end the city disappears into the vast Pacific.

This future is both funny and horrifying. The author Liang Xiaosheng made his name in the early 1980s with his novels about the heroism of the "sent-down" Red Guards in the snow blizzards of the plantations. Now he appears bitterly disillusioned with virtually everyone in China: his satire on the "going-abroad" madness is equally as bitter as that on patriotism, and the accusation against the power-money clique is mingled with an equally spiteful dismissal of "Leftist" idealism.

Late Qing fiction is often labelled as "satirical novels", but all of those authors were full of beautiful expectations when looking to the future. The overwhelming majority of the novels of the future in the 1990s, however, are permeated by pessimism, though none of them goes as far as Floating city, where the only thing that looks worthwhile is to let this land of degeneration sink into the ocean.

5.

The few optimistic exceptions to the overall pessimism are military novels of the future. The earliest among them seems to be *The Gate to Doomsday* (1995), by Qiao Liang, a writer in the political department of the Chinese air force.

The hero, Major Li Han, staff member of the Chinese army stationed in Hong Kong, is one of the new type of young Chinese officers. In the novel, however, the so-called "three skills" required of the new generation of army officers—driving, English and computer literacy—are dramatized into three stunts; film-like car chase, multilingualism ("with a pure Manhattan accent") and the ability to hack into any system. In addition, the new Chinese officer has to be so handsome that women of every nationality find him irresistible. In a word, there must appear in the Chinese army a new generation of officers worthy of the admiration of American generals, while remaining absolutely loyal to "the cause of the Chinese people".

The novel starts with a conflict in Kashmir at the beginning of 2000. Pakistan is losing the war, but China "cannot afford to see the Subcontinent dominated by one country". The Second Sino-Indian war begins. The novel offers a vivid description of a ground battle in Kashmir and a sea battle near Singapore. In the former, the Chinese army division is equipped with an overwhelming number of helicopters instead of tanks, while in the latter, the Chinese navy makes full use of its more sophisticated electronic gadgets (a silicon battle, as it is called in the novel). China wins both of these crucial battles, but seems to suffer far more severe casualties in this future war compared with the crushing victory in the actual Sino-Indian war in 1962 because, the novel claims, India has spent generously on the modernization of its army and on Russian-built carriers.

The second half seems almost to be a different novel, with eight regional wars flaring up around the world in the year 2000. With the entire world order collapsing, the heads of the G7 powers meet the Pope and the UN General Secretary at the Vatican. At this moment, a group of international terrorists succeeds in kidnapping them by paralyzing the whole world with a powerful computer virus, bringing the communication and transport systems of every country to a halt.

Then there is a further example of "backwardness turned into advantage". Since China allowed only a few gateways to the Internet, the government, heeding the forewarning of our hero, has installed a "virus filter" on them. While other countries can only resort to the Morse telegraph machines found in museums to attempt to re-establish primitive communication, China alone is advanced by a century, and all the world powers have to seek help from her. In the end our hero, aided by a secret detachment flown over from China, wipes out all the terrorists in a car chase across Munich.

Again, China saves the world, though this time thanks to a brilliant young officer. The world of 2000 is indeed a chaotic and filthy place, calling for a Chinese hero to give it a clean sweep.

What is noteworthy in the novel is that in the military and diplomatic wars, Chinese people are said to remain clear-headed. The huge screen on the streets of Beijing broadcasts live the decisive Sino-Indian sea battle, and the watching crowd demonstrate "no nationalistic frenzy but a Chinese-style composure and restraint."[15]

If this novel outlines the Chinese military's conscious or unconscious expectations of the near future, we can see that there are several aspects worthy of attention. For

[15] Qiao Liang, *Mori Zhi Men* (The Gate to Doomsday, Beijing: Kunlun Chubanshe, 1995), 263.

instance, China might have a conflict of interest with all of her neighbors, but could still co-operate with the United States and West Europe on most issues. This basic strategic scheme seems to remain in those novels published in more recent years.[16]

Towards the end of *The Gate to Doomsday*, a top PLA general interposes a commentary in the narrative, "It was none but that border war twenty years ago [i.e. the Sino-Vietnamese war in 1980] that cleared away the antagonism between China and the West… thus initiating the process of our modernization". Hearing this, our hero Major Li Han salutes him. The re-interpretation of the past is thus turned into the guidance for the future: it is suggested that the Chinese military force, with a new generation of the best and brightest officers, would finally spearhead China's advance to meet the challenges—whether or not violent—in tomorrow's world.

6.

Far Goes the Girl by Hong Ying tells the story of a young Chinese woman's adventures in the year 1999 in Shanghai, New York and Prague, in its three parts *The Carnation Club*, *The Woman from the Ancient Country*, and *Boxers of the Millennium*. They were written between 1993 and 1995 and were published separately in magazines before being collected into a single book in 1996.[17]

Hong Ying is the only female writer among the novelists under discussion, and her narrator the only female narrator-protagonist of the future, though her ability to unfold a gigantic "historical" scene does not pale beside that of the male writers. Hong Ying is the only writer among those under discussion who lives abroad, and the West under her pen does not have to be "genuinely Western", thus more boldly futuristic.

The three novellas, seemingly dealing with sex, religion, and nationalism respectively, actually concentrate on the issue of gender and its relation to power: every time women become tools in the power struggle, even in women-only organizations, or in a company with a female boss, the threat of male dominance is still omnipresent. Even the womb is not an organ that belongs to a woman as a person but an instrument in the power struggle in a man's world.

In the first part of the trilogy, Shanghai at the end of the century is ruled by the underworld organizations eager to avenge the wrongs of the past with violence. Although the lesbian club with the first-person narrator-protagonist as the leader tries to endorse non-violent reform, more and more "comrades" in the club go about cutting off the male organ to settle scores with men. When her former boyfriend turns up, the narrator suspects that he might be a saboteur and sends her closest deputy to investigate; somehow she is seduced by the man and betrays the club. In the end, the extremist wing in the club gains the upper hand, and the narrator, dejected, has to leave the city.

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[16]We may well suspect that the outlook of the Chinese military has totally changed in the post-Kosovan age. In *Shooting Down the Magic Scorpion* (Jiluo Mojie Xing) a future novel published by the PLA Literature Press (Jiefangjun Wenyi Chubanshe) in Beijing, in September 1999 after the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, it is still the Chinese "special Force" in co-operation with CIA that thwarts a Japanese conspiracy.

[17]Hong Ying, *Nuzi youxing* (Far goes the girl, Taipei: Erya Chubanshe, 1996; Nanjing: Jiangsu Wenyi Chubanshe: 1998).

She comes to New York, where "although the white discriminate against the colored races, the hatred among the colored themselves is more bitter". North Manhattan has been occupied by the black fighting the yellow people who control South Manhattan, whereas the whites have retreated to the outskirts, and provoked a bloody "interracial war" in order "to solve the racial problems that have been the plague of the nation for the whole century". In the post-colonial period, however, the race struggle is waged mainly on the cultural front. Tantric Buddhism is the "official religion" in South Manhattan. The narrator-protagonist is surprised to find several groups of killers stalking her. The handsome man who has repeatedly saved her tells her that she conforms completely with the testament left by the deceased Living Buddha for his reincarnation, and since she is pregnant now with the man's child, it must be the Sacred Child. Although she is in love with the man she refuses to be part of the conspiracy. In an ambush by the man's political rivals in the power struggle, she has a miscarriage and loses any interest in staying in that country.

In her predicament, a girlfriend of the old days invites her to Prague, where the friend is the President of the Oriental Consortium that controls the economy of Eastern Europe. The narrator-protagonist stumbles into a kidnapping carried out by the European Leftist Party. The Czech government pretends to protect foreign investment while half-heartedly instigating rebellion. In the trial of the kidnappers, out of sympathy with the Czech people, the narrator testifies in favor of the rebels and is therefore arrested by the Oriental Consortium. On the eve of the New Millennium, the Czech people stage an uprising with primitive weapons against the electronically guarded Consortium. Facing the collapsing of her business, her friend refuses to flee on board the helicopter sent by the Czech government and commits suicide. Once again the narrator has to leave, still alone in the world.

There are a number of wild scenes of sexual indulgence in the novel—lesbian love, Tantric "coital cultivation", nudist camps of the East European liberals, sex orgies—all supposed to be part of another sexual liberation in the post-AIDS future. This may not be the author's whim: Western scholars of feminist novels of the future find, "Because women have traditionally been validated or invalidated, identified as 'womanly' or not, by the extent to which their bodies conformed to social norms, it is not surprising that female conceptual artists, once overtly influenced by feminism, turned to 'body art' to question and search out their identity."[18]

Perhaps because the novelist is also a poet, she seems reluctant to let go any opportunities of poetic reverie, and these novellas, therefore, often proceed in fragmentation. In contrast, the works of the male novelists discussed above might have paid too much attention to the motivation of the plot logic, for the purpose of convincing readers of the true value of their prediction. One of the results is that most of those "male" novels have a strong flavor of popular fiction. Hong Ying's novel at least proves (along with Wang Xiaobo's, discussed in the next section) that stylistically very different works can be produced in this same thematic category.

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[18]Natalie Rosinsky, *Feminist Futures: Contemporary Women's Speculative Fiction* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 2.

Also, perhaps because the female author maintains a sarcastic attitude towards all the tricks in the power struggle, the female narrator-protagonist seems to care little about what China or the world will come to. Her involvement in "historical" events is forced upon her, whether she plays the role of leader, mother of a Living Buddha, or political dissident. In all these "noble causes" the only role she plays earnestly is that of lover. It looks as if all the sea-changes of the world are of less importance than personal feelings in the war of love. That is why her stand on such "decisive struggles for the course of history" is actually guided by her personal feelings, which often run against the "corporate will" at the risk of her life.

Chen Xiaoming argues that *Far Goes the Girl* is "an exhibition of female daydreams, and, beyond doubt, the most rebellious female writing hitherto in Chinese literature."[19] His words are of course true: the novels of the future by male writers are not "male daydreaming", because male daydreams are more often than not the dreams of institutionalized society.

The author seems to be aware of this: the whole novel seems to be saying that women cannot have their way—all personalized experience has to be integrated into the will of the institution, perhaps more so in the future, where any personal yearnings will suffer ruthless suppression no matter to where the protagonist flees. At the very end of the novel, the protagonist tries to find an answer to the question that has been tormenting her: where can she find a reason to go on living. But inside the virtual world constructed by the supercomputer, she is led to one millennium ago, where she finds mulberry trees and millet all over the river banks, and inns along the road selling wines much richer and mellower than those available now.

7.

Wang Xiaobo, who died of a heart-attack in 1997, was a maverick on the contemporary Chinese literary scene. In his short career he wrote five novellas of the future:[20] which share the same narrator or protagonist and could be read as five parts of one loosely-constructed novel.

Starting from the year 2020 as the "narrating now", all of Wang Xiaobo's novellas of the future are anchored in various years in the past with respect to this future.

The story of the novella *The Silver Age* takes place in the year 2020, when the narrator-protagonist is in the employment of a "writing company" for re-writing his novel *A Teacher-student Love* in which "I myself" is the narrator-protagonist. It has been a bestseller for many years: the sexy female teacher belongs to the past when love was hot and exciting. In this editing room there are four men and three women, and the flirtations among them are mutually tormenting, leading to no action at all. In the novel within the novel, however, the teacher once said, "The world of the future

[19] Chen Xiaoming, "Nuxing Bairimeng yu Lishi Yuyan" (Female Daydreaming and Historic Fables), in *Nuzi Youxing* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Wenyi Chubanshe, 1998), 4.

[20] The collection *Baiyin Shidai* (The Silver Age, Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe, 1997), compiled by Wang Xiaobo himself, comprises four novellas: *The Silver Age*, *Future World I*, *My Uncle Future WorldII* and *2015.* After his death the editor of his works found another novella of the future, *2010*, on his diskette and had it published in *Heitie Shidai* (The Iron Age: Early and Unfinished Works, Changchun: Shidai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1998).

will be silver" and now the narrator understands she meant to say that, in the world after "heat death", love no longer glitters.

The repeated re-writings of the scenes of love-making provide only variations of masturbatory fantasies. "When the manuscript leaves me, it has to go through several dozens of revisions until it is exactly the same as the First Edition."[21] The purpose of the revision is to make sure that there is distance between writing and reality, though "The reality today contains not much sex… a little fumbling is considered more than enough."

In *My uncle*, the narrator is a "licensed historian", writing a biography of his uncle who was a writer at the end of the last century. Since his license did not come easily, he is determined not to commit any error. He starts, in this novella *My uncle*, to write a historical book *My uncle*, which is serialized in a magazine, but "attracts serious attacks in the Media". When the narrator has finished his book by letting uncle drop to his death in a lift shaft, he himself has to be sent to "study class", and his license is withdrawn.

In *Myself*, the narrator is sent by the Social Security Company to live in a re-installation camp sharing a room with a former prostitute who is also being reformed. He respects her and never touches her. But when he discovers that she is actually a spy sent by the authorities, he has sex with her day and night ceaselessly, because "there's no point in refraining from shagging a company woman".

2015 tells the story of the narrator's uncle when he was an avant-garde painter. Because his painting is beyond anyone's understanding and makes people dizzy, he is expelled from the Artists' Association, and is repeatedly arrested for "selling art works without a license". Finally he is sent to the "vocational reformatory" specially designed for avant-garde artists, where electric shock treatment is employed to drain them of their sexual drive. Finally he is doing hard labor at a desolate seaside watched over by a policewoman who sunbathes naked nearby, and forces him, with a pistol at his head, to provide "sexual service" to her. When uncle is finally released from the labor camp, he marries the policewoman, his criminal propensity to avant-gardism now rectified.

In *2010*, this uncle works as the head of the department for diesel engine design in the beach resort of Beidaihe which has turned into an extremely polluted "new industrial city". This is the time when adults are prone to the disease of innumeracy, and once infected, they can only be promoted to leadership, since they lose all ideas about numbers. Anyway, "in a Communist Society, each is given what he needs and no counting is necessary". Therefore former artists like uncle have to take over the duty of designing machines.

Since all pretty women are married to innumerate leaders who have power as well as impotence, all of them have former artists as lovers. The policewoman who once married uncle is now Mrs Mayor, but uncle is still her lover. To overcome the general dejection, uncle decides to hold a grand party, at which thirty-thousand people enjoy a three-day-and-night orgy, "with condoms filling half a garbage truck". Since all

[21] Wang Xiaobo, *Baiyin Shidai* (The Silver Age), 8.

the leaders' wives have joined in, it is finally decided that this is a punishable crime, and a "Singaporean-style" caning is applied to the organizers.

The celebrated hallmark of Wang Xiaobo's works is his wild exaggeration with a sharp edge. His novels are full of wild sex fantasies and sadistic punishments, of which he never exhausts the variations. However, because of the brilliant jokes, the sexual descriptions never border on the obscene.

It is true that sex and power are perpetual themes in almost all of Wang Xiaobo's novels set in the past. For instance, his celebrated novels about the life of the "sent-down" youth during the Cultural Revolution are full of sex fantasies too. But the sexual scenes and their punishments are imbued with a carnivalesque atmosphere, and the sarcasm the author offers seems to take the teeth out of political suppression: power tries to humiliate sex, while the young people who revolt with sexual offenses exhibit sex in a shameless manner, thus making the powerful—the military or the Revolutionary Committee—ridiculous. In this manner, "the Cultural Revolution is recast by Wang's language into a Gold Age."[22]

Similar subject matter is found in Wang Xiaobo's novels of the future, where, however, a much more ruthless and inescapable suppression threatens every incident, even though they are still funny and sexually explicit. In the scence of punishment in *2010*, for instance, the girl who has to be caned is stripped to the waist, and she asks uncle to kiss her "round and firm breasts". Since the scene is being broadcast live on TV all over the country, the regime has to start a campaign to ferret out those "who saw it": anyone who acknowledges he did is forced to write a self-criticism with punishing severity.

Stupidity is now the precondition of power, and the institution of power itself is "cuckoldable". What is more, in Wang Xiaobo's future, sex is often the execution of power that turns love into a sadistic torture. The executioners are often women, enchanting bodies wrapped in black leather and wielding merciless whips. The ruled can now only make a choice between suffering the torture and forcing themselves to enjoy it, until they can hardly distinguish between oppression and masochism.

Whereas the past can be subverted by celebrating of the joy of sex, the sex-violence in the future can only be endured. Sex is then the name of the game of power. Even uncle's male organ must obey the orders of the policewoman to stand to attention or turn right or left. This farcical scene has been repeated twice in Wang Xiaobo's unfinished manuscripts. The novelist seemed to like the symbol: the sexual organ is subjugated by power against the will of the subject.

In Wang Xiaobo's novel of the future, however, the narrators and or protagonists are mostly novelists, artists and historians. Wang took pride in his scientific education in China and in the United States, which made him believe that science will never make people foolish: the future can only be fouled up by unscientific power. Therefore, the future, though bleak in his vision, falls along a regressional trajectory: "Time progresses fast, from nothingness to mathematics, to history, and possibly to fiction in the future".

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[22] Ai Xiaoming, "Heitie Shidai Qianyan" (Introduction to *The Iron Age*), *The Iron Age* (Changchun: Shidai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1998), 2.

That is why, I think, we can find little evidence of a castigating tone in his description of the coming dystopia. According to Emmanuel Levinas, refusing to reprimand is a rare quality in works about the future.[23] Examining many novels in the sub-genre, we can see that this is by no means easy in a novel that not only provides serious warning about the future but also exudes such a buoyant humor.

Wang Xiaobo's works are undoubtedly a high-water mark for Chinese novels of the future. When the twentieth century that virtually strangled the genre was coming to its end, there emerged, at last, some achievements that do not look pale beside the b est works of the genre from other countries.

8.

The future in the novel of the future remains forever in the future. After the year 1984, *1984* remains a novel of the future. Among the works discussed in the present paper three set their stories in the year 1999, but they are still enjoyable novels of the future for twenty-first century readers. What is more, according to the narrator of *Far Goes the Girl*, the year 1999 is not the end of everything, since 999 is a point poised to return to l in Chinese mystic mathematics. What could surface in this fictional year is only a series of cultural problems that have hitherto been neglected and, therefore, are magnified by the novel.

Thus, the novel of the future can be said to redeem reality in the absence of real time. Once this absent futurity takes its seat, that is, turns itself into praxis, utopianism disappears. That is why in the better works under discussion, the admonishment of the present is in a constant intransitive mode, and its edge is not blunted by attacking something too close.

The overwhelming pessimism in recent Chinese novels of the future, in contrast to the optimism at the beginning of the century, can be explained by the fact that it accords with the mood of authors speculating on the social reality in 1990s China. But a more careful look reveals that Late Qing authors were even more caustic about their social reality. When they talked about society, they always bewailed their own time. But every time they looked at the future, they were simply incapable of conceiving a pessimistic picture: they had only optimism about progress. This adoration of progress had been lost in China by the end of the twentieth century.

One of the reasons for this loss of optimism, I would argue, is that mono-dimensional history has ended in China. After the frenzied utopian experiment and the atrocities that were carried out in its name, the progressive view is no longer the only rational interpretation of history. The future is not the redemption by definition of the evils of the present.

Another reason, I think, is perhaps more important—the cultural role of art in Chinese culture has changed. Fiction is now relieved of the educational function it was once assigned. The modern novel of the future hardly serves as prediction or forewarning as it did in Late Qing. It looks ever more like the fireworks of imagination itself flying and sparkling off in various directions.

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[23] In his essay "Simulacra: the end of the world", Emmanuel Levinas questions, "Who could speak of these traits (of the possible new kind of spirituality) without appearing to sermonise?", in David Wood (ed.), *Writing the future* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 13.

A question that the present study can hardly evade is why the novel of the future did not re-emerge in China until so late, in the 1990s?

First of all, I would like to point out that a large number of "spatial" utopian novels appeared in the 1980s. The entire roots-seeking (*Xungen*) movement in art and literature is utopian. Roots-seeking novels are actually trying to find a remedy in uncontaminated remote regions or minority populations, or in the remnants of a subculture, for the purpose of re-invigorating the senile, impotent institutionalized Chinese culture. Some dystopian roots-seeking novels (for instance, Han Shaogong's *Dad Dad Dad*) bemoan the loss of such a hope, yet the dream is kept alive.

After the tremendous waves of roots-seeking gradually calmed down, in the early 1990s there appeared a few artistically more matured post-roots-seeking novels, e.g. Mo Yan's *Wineland* (Jiuguo) and Gao Xingjian's *Soul mountain* (Lingshan, which won the author the first Chinese Nobel Prize in 2001). The goal of those novels is no longer to find a remedy for the present but to find solace in seeking: they take seeking itself as the goal.

No wonder the time in those novels is often the quasi-present: there is hardly any indication in the novel of the time anchorage. The necessity of accessing it—the condition of utopia, as described at the beginning of this article—is therefore deferred. After that, it was almost inevitable for the temporal utopia/dystopia to step in.

I have to acknowledge that by the turn of the new century utopian novels, either of time or of space, were no longer a welcome commodity in China. The mainstream "realist" literature tries to duplicate the desire of the populace, satisfying its need to see the validity of their day-to-day experience. It is already fashionable to refuse anything with any utopian trace, especially among the so-called "Later Generation Novelists" (Wansheng Dai Zuojia).[24]

Fortunately, another characteristic of Chinese culture in the 1990s was pluri-culturalism, which does not mean the symbiosis of different sectors of equal values, according to the "common" interpretation. It actually means, I have to insist, that different sectors of the culture seek different goals in life without claiming control over other sectors. Thus, against the murky background of recent Chinese culture, the novel of the future has kept bringing us interesting works that have preserved the sharpness of the critical edge against the praxis thanks to their utopian foresight.

It has long been a complaint shared by many critics that the vision of modern Chinese literature is seriously limited to practicality, or "social reality".[25] If this criticism contains some truth, we have to blame the Grand Utopia that was, for too many years, being forcibly practiced in all earnest, thus wringing the nation's imagination dry and immersing the nation's art in the mundane. Nevertheless, in

[24]See Feng Qun and Hong Zhigang, "Wutobang De Beili yu Xieshi de Kundun "(The Betrayal of Utopia and the Predicament of Realism), *Wenyi Pinglun*, No. 3, 1996, 34.

[25]This view was, as is well-known, first expressed by C. T. Hsia in his *History of modern Chinese novel a*s "the obsession with China". It has been echoed by other critics of Chinese literature.

recent Chinese novels of the future, we can see that Chinese literature is finally trying to escape from this self-created prison, taking into its vision the prospect of the human world.

In the rest of the world the novel of the future has developed into a huge genre over the last few centuries, so huge that tertiary literature (bibliography of criticism and anthologies,[26] or criticism of criticisms[27]) has been called for. As for Chinese literature, the present paper seems to be the first effort to tackle this subject (if we do not want to confuse the genre with science fiction), which explains why it is more descriptive than theoretical.

Nevertheless, as Zhu Dake asked, "Can mankind, who was born in God's Utopia, forsake its nature given in the cradle?"[28] The long absence of the novel of the future in China was a symptom of the serious hypertension in Chinese art and literature in this century, pinioned for so long under the vice-like grip of the Grand Utopia, and, once this Grand Utopia disintegrated, the re-emergence of the novel of the future was only a matter of time.

The novels discussed in the present paper are far from equally successful in their effort to shake off the "obsession with the real" to which twentieth-century Chinese literature seems to be condemned. But the novel of the future can only take off on the wings of imagination. If Chinese novelists intend to have a vision of what is in store but lack the power of imagination, they can only crash down in the same manner as many Late Qing novels of the future.

Taken collectively, however, the Chinese novel of the future could be said to have finally pecked through the shell of sterility of modern Chinese literature. Is this not an event that merits a closer look? Not only to see the future in, but that of, Chinese imagination?

[26]For example, Paul Haschak, *Utopia/dystopia Literature: A Bibliography of Literary Criticism* (Metuchen, NJ and London: Scarecrow Press 1994).

[27]For example, Wood, *Writing the Future.*

[28]Zhu Dake, "Miaohua Langman Zhuyi" (A Nostalgia of Romanticism), in his essay collection *Guozao de Shidai* (The Time of Noise, Changsha: Hunan Wenyi Chubanshe), 13.

Chapter 16
Sensing the Shift—New Wave Literature and Chinese Culture

16.1 My Intention

This essay is intended for a few friends who hold that Chinese culture has long been disintegrating. It cannot be saved, nor does it need to be saved. Recent Chinese literature, they hold, is another effort to totally subvert the Chinese cultural tradition.

This essay is also meant for other friends who maintain that the May Fourth Movement, the cultural criticism movement that saw the inception of *modern* Chinese literature, was too hasty in destroying the continuity of Chinese tradition, and thus actually impeded the modernization of Chinese culture. Chinese intellectuals, especially the younger generation are, it is claimed, repeating this mistake.

The present paper is not a compromise between the two positions. It only suggests a new angle from which to view the opposition of traditionalism and anti-traditionalism in modern Chinese fiction, and takes a few steps further.

16.2 The Three Continuities

Culture is humanity's most complex creation. I suggest that we regard culture as the sum of all socially-related significations (and their interpretations). Although almost all human activities can be regarded as significations, some are pure signification activities, some are partial ones, and yet others have only a marginal signifying function.

These activities of signification and interpretation can be coordinated because there are norms, values and ethical codes that control them. All the controlling activities merge into a cultural metalanguage, which is basically what we call ideology. There is however, another level of activities above them all—activities which try to tidy Lip, to speculate on, and to modify this metalanguage. Philosophy, linguistics, literature and art are among these activities. Perhaps they can all be put under one old heading—"Letters" in its broadest sense.

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Y. Zhao, *The River Fans Out*, China Academic Library,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6_16

Let me borrow from Chinese historiography three concepts to summarize traditionalism in the three kinds of activities.

The Continuity of Rule (Fa Tong) denotes, in this essay, the continuity of the manner of governing, of the organization of the regime, the division of classes in society, etc. These are the most public part of cultural activities. This continuity can be claimed by any regime whose rule is maintained as valid for a sufficiently long period.

The Continuity of Truth (Dao Tong) refers to the continuity of the manner of controlling and regulating signification and interpretation. So long as the control of the interpretative codes is validated, whether the actual political practice is just or not is of little importance.

The Continuity of Letters (Wen Tong), by which I mean the tradition of the Humanities, even though there was no such concept in (Classical Chinese. This is the activity that questions, speculates on and readjusts signification in society. Literature is definitely its most complicated manifestation, and deserves more careful study.

According to *The Records of History*, the Prince of Qin declared in the seventh century BC, "China is ruled by Poetry and Books, Rites and Music, and Law and Order." The three Traditions are listed together, and the sequence is considered.

On the large scale of Chinese history, the way these three aspects have been preserved and transformed has been very different. The Continuity of Letters seemed to be the most persistent as it usually remained unchanged as the dynasties succeeded one another.

At a glance, we can discover that the flourishing and decline of the three have often overlapped. In the so-called "periods of prosperity" in Chinese history, the Continuity of Rule was stable, the Continuity of Truth was firmly monolithic, and the pressure to maintain the Continuity of Letters was usually so great that the introduction of new forms of literature was at least discouraged. In so-called "periods of chaos", political and ideological control is relaxed, and literature often prospers. Indeed we may say that the May Fourth Movement was possible because the Government was made so weak by the warlords who were preoccupied with civil war that ideological control was seriously slackened.[1] The Beijing regime at the time was definitely hostile toward the New Culture Movement. It tried co confiscate books and expel certain academics from the universities, but the orders were never executed effectively. Indeed there can be found only a small number of documents about governmental suppression of the May Fourth Movement.[2]

I propose, however, that we look at these "chaotic" times from another angle: in the periods during which the Continuity of Rule is broken, and the Continuity of Truth is in crisis, the survival of Chinese culture relies mainly on the adaptability of the Continuity of Letters, since Chinese culture at such junctures is in need not only

[1]Please refer to my forthcoming book *The Uneasy, Narrator: Chinese Fiction from the Traditional to the Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), which cites examples showing the government's inability to interfere in the May Fourth cultural movement.

[2]In the Volume of Historical Documents, *Zhonggou Xin Wenxue Daxi* (The Omnibus of Chinese New Literature, 1935) edited by Zhao Jiabi, there is a special section devoted to the government's suppression. The documents in this "section" too few to justify its title.

of survival but also of reorientation. The crisis of a regime and its ideology not only creates an opportunity for reorientation but also a need for it. And the Continuity of Letters plays a particularly important role in this reorientation.

Chinese culture is the world's longest surviving culture, and is sure to regain its vitality. It is only a half truth to say that the reason for this survival is its stubborn exclusiveness, or "super-stability". Its ability to re-orientate itself has been, I would claim, an even more important reason.

16.3 New Wave Sensibility?

This bold and assertive argument was put forward here only to answer one small question: What, after all, is the sensibility that has been the driving force of the New Wave of literature since 1985?

Often we hear the lament: that contemporary Chinese literature suffers from a "lack of modern sensibility", without which, it is argued, there could be only a "pseudo-modernism". It is also suggested that this modern sensibility could only be the product of modern existence—modern modes production and ways of life. Since these do not yet exist in a China which is still under-developed, New Wave literature, especially its avant-garde arm, is nothing more than an imported fashion. It should be considered a premature development in art, as is the premature consumerism that is also part of China today, New Wave literature is nothing more than canned soft-drink, fashionable but not yet affordable for the majority of the Chinese people.

New Wave criticism, as an important part of New Wave literature, has not yet offered a satisfactory answer to this argument. Without: an understanding of this mysterious "sensibility", the impetus of the movement will be curbed, if it has not been already.

The old challenge has a new refrain: "The New Wave can only by appreciated by Western scholars. Chinese critics of the new school are merely slavishly echoing Western scholars of Chinese literature. Chinese readers do not like it." I, along with many of my colleagues, are angered by this accusation, since it is totally groundless. The New Wave has been supported all along by Chinese critics, while Western scholars of contemporary Chinese literature are still very much out of touch.[3] Nevertheless, we have to answer the second half of the question. It is true that the majority of Chinese fiction readers do not appreciate New Wave Fiction. But why?

[3] An outstanding example: the Chinese writer that interests Western critics and publishers most is Zhang Xianliang. The only selection of Avant-Garde Fiction Currently available in English is *The Lost Boat: Avant-Garde from China*, compiled by myself (London: Wellsweep Press, 1993).

16.4 Pre-textuality

The theoretical ground for the argument of "pseudo-modernism" is that literary sensibility generally grows with, if not from, the development of social conditions. This is at best an over-simplification.

There is no denying that social life has provided literature with empirical material. Yet any genre, at a certain stage of development, should be turning to itself, as a text turns to previous texts which are more or less familiar to its readers, for subject matter as well as for interpretative criteria. In the history of Chinese poetry we can see that from *The Book of Songs* (compiled c. 7th c. BC) and *The Music Department Collections* (c. 2nd to 1st c. BC) to the great periods of Tang and Song, the reliance on social experience gradually Fades. With the accumulation of pre-textuality, the demands on the reader's knowledge of previous literature becomes greater.[4]

Pre-textuality is actually the presence of the whole cultural tradition in the text.

In early 1980s, Li Zehou, the leading contemporary Chinese aesthetician, put forward the proposition of "the Sedimentation of Cultural Mentality" which argues that the "practical rationalism" of the Chinese nation is "the sediment of the whole of Chinese material and spiritual civilization that presents itself in medicine, agriculture, war, historiography, philosophy…etc."[5] This is a universal segmentation. All cultural activities add to the sediment, and the sediment covers all areas. Li did not try to classify the cultural activities according to how they contribute to the sedimentation.

Li's proposition was severely criticized by Liu Xiaobo, a much younger critic, who refuted the proposition with harsh words, "a theory that is supposed to be able to solve all problems is unable to solve any problem." To replace this "all-round sediment" theory, however, he suggests a theory of all-round negation. "Culture," as he puts it, "is not an apple beginning to rot that could still be eaten after the rotten part has been gouged out."[6] Instead culture, when partly rotten, should be thrown away altogether.

Indeed the activities of meaning-practice leave little pre-textuality. After a war that cost tens of thousands of lives, the only remaining thing might be "a rusted spearhead picked up by a shepherd boy on the hillside". The activities of meaning-control could leave many more traces, while the efforts to modify codes are meaningful only through the pre-textuality they leave behind. On the other hand, the three kinds of activities, when practiced, experience different pressure from the past—with the last almost totally dependent on pre-textuality.

This is why the history of literature has to be constantly rewritten.

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[4]There is no fundamental difference between my conception of pre-textuality and Julia Kristeva's intertextuality. But she emphasizes more the mutual control of co-existent texts while I emphasize the accumulation of the control of previous texts.

[5]Li Zehou, *Zhongguo Xiandai Sixiang Shitun* (A History of Modern Thought in China), Beijing: Dongfang Chubanshe, 1987, p. 321.

[6]Liu Xiaobo, *Xuanze de Pipan* (The Critique of Choice), Shanghai: Shanghai Remin Chubanshe, 1988, p. 14.

16.5 Pre-textuality During Cultural Reorientation

whether a Treasure or a Burden, The abundance of pre-textuality in Chinese culture is something that Chinese literature must acknowledge.

Chinese culture has two different phases of development—continuation and reorientation. In Chinese history, we can detect at least three periods of drastic reorientation: the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States (eighth to third centuries BC), Wei-Jin and Six Dynasties (AD third to sixth centuries), and Southern Song and Yuan (AD twelfth to fourteenth centuries).[7] Each period of reorientation is followed by a period of relative stable development, that is, periods of continuation. These were, however, also periods of accumulation of tension which would eventually lead to a breaking point, thus calling for another reorientation.

In the late Ming, starting from the mid-sixteenth century, a reorientation was rapidly brewing following the decay of the Continuities of Rule and Truth. Among late Ming literati, there were large numbers of intellectual rebels and ideological dissidents. Many of them showed great interest in popular literature, even in "pornographic" novels. Some of these were, indeed, written by these same scholars themselves. The realm of Letters was changing drastically.

Regrettably, peasant uprisings destroyed the weakened Continuity of Rule too rapidly, and the invading Manchus effectively rebuilt this Continuity in the mid seventeenth century. In order to justify their foreign rule, they tried best to re-establish Confucian orthodoxy. A potential reorientation that: might have taken place at a critical historical juncture (almost simultaneous with the Renaissance in the West) was abortive. An opportunity to make Chinese culture flexible enough to face modern times was lost.

The next reorientation period of Chinese culture is none other than modern times. Since the late nineteenth century, Chinese culture has been confronted with one of the most serious challenges in its history—to re-orientate in order to face the modern world. This period has been dubbed, by the alarmists the "Crisis of Chinese Culture" repeatedly, although in my view it is, rather, a period of profound reorientation.

This reorientation has been difficult. More than one hundred years have passed, with still no immediate prospect of success. Yet history tells us that the reorientation of Chinese culture always took much longer than one century. If that is the case, my pessimistic friends should perhaps be less worried.

During the periods of reorientation, old genres are often found to be too heavily burdened with pre-textuality (cluttered, for instance, with too many hackneyed expressions, allusions, conventions, etc.), and new genres are called for. This very fact causes art and literature to flourish. For being new is indeed the first requirement of literature. The poetry and philosophical essays before the second century BC, the

[7]Not everyone would agree with me that the Southern Song and Yuan is a period of cultural reorientation. The Neo-Confucianism that arose in this period was certainly an effort to consolidate the traditional ideology. Nevertheless, the rise of vernacular literature, together with the rise of Neo-Confucianism, transformed Chinese culture from one that was relatively homogenous to one that: was overtly stratified.

Five-character poetry and rhapsodic thyme prose of the third to sixth centuries, the vernacular fiction and drama of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries, are all the high points of Chinese literary history.

In these periods, social conditions were miserable, with incursions of nomadic invaders, the rapid impoverishment of the people, and the collapse of social order. If literature reflects social reality, the dominant theme in those periods should have been the sufferings of the people. But in fact the opposite seems to have been the case. Accounts of the people's suffering are much less in evidence in the literature of those periods as compared with other periods of stability.

To the literature of these periods, the problem of cultural reorientation is more important than social life. Its literature emphasizes cultural, or rather spiritual, values. Their relations with the cultural tradition, i.e., pre-textuality, become the focus of attention.

That is why Chinese literature in the periods of reorientation is different: in style from that of the stable periods. The former, more obsessed with speculation, is stranger, more fantastic and original in style, while the latter, more embedded in society, is broader, more magnanimous, more profound.

16.6 The Search Outside

Since very early times, Chinese culture has predominantly been a culture that values literature highly. Oral and other non-literate texts (music, for instance) did not have sufficient meaning power, and lacked the ability to produce pre-textuality.

Chinese culture was not ever thus. In the Classics prior to the second century BC there were many passages emphasizing the importance of the "cultural education" of music or the "cultural supremacy" of dance. Literary domination set in at the end of the first reorientation period. The sharing of meaning power by non-literary forms of "texts" was brought to an end, and the dependence on the literary became greater in Chinese culture than in any other.

This literary dependence may have something to do with the non-phonetic nature of the Chinese language. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the Chinese people, since those times, no longer excelled in singing and dancing when contrasted with the "barbarians" surrounding them. Confucius' obsession with music has never been fully understood by Confucian scholars for more than two thousands years. They only took it as a complement to Confucius' emphasis on the Rites. Even Chinese statesmen have seldom striven to excel in oratory (in sharp contrast with the statesmanship of the Warring Stares period of 4th to 3rd c. BC) but pride themselves on writing elegant essays.

Literary culture enjoys greater capacity for continuity, since written texts can be easily preserved, reread and reprinted. The failure of the burning of books by the First Emperor proved that pre-textuality, once formed, can hardly be wiped out by political force.

The conservation of this tradition, nevertheless, leads its lack of flexibility. The ease of the production of pre-textuality naturally leads to the weight of accumulation. After a period of stability, the excess pressure of Letters combined with the inefficiency of Rule and the hypocritization of the Truth, and Chinese culture is then left with no choice but to re-orientate.

Looking back at Chinese history, we find that, in literature, reorientation often includes an expansion of the generic range, that is, the exploration of new genres and new forms. These new forms can come from two sources. Sometimes the sub-cultural oral genres are absorbed into mainstream literature, and we can see a re-adjustment of position between centrality and marginality. Sometimes the new forms come from other cultures, and we can see a re-adjustment of the relationship between the center and other centers. In the Southern Song and Yuan period (AD 12th to 14th c.), it was mainly the oral sub-cultural strata that served to supply new genres; in the Six Dynasties (AD 5th to 6th c.) and modern times, alien cultures seem to have been the main sources of new forms.[8]

The adoption of new genres creates not only a rupture in the Continuity of Letters, but also an opportunity to re-examine pre-textuality and to consider a new mode of accumulation. For instance, modern Chinese poetry, beginning in the late 1910s, started to use vernacular Chinese as the new poetic language, and borrowed Western stanzaic forms. The first aim was in fact to shake off the too cumbersome accumulation of pre-textuality in Chinese poetry, because it has imposed a huge burden of allusions and poetic diction upon the writing; of poetry. The "New Poetry" succeeded in integrating; the spirit of the Greek gods and goddess with the passion of *Songs of the South*, in combining Anglo-American imagist principles with the traditional Chinese attention to images; the religious quietism of Tagore with the serenity of Chinese art. Many scholars hold that Chinese New Poetry was a typical subversion of national tradition by Western influence.[9] I prefer to see New Poetry as a more effective continuation of Chinese tradition—its transformation, not its disruption—because the new genres were quite successfully grafted onto the pre-textuality of Chinese culture.

To use the terms of semiotics, we may say that in periods of reorientation, syntagmatic expansion is the main form of development, with the component genres re-adjusting their relative positions; in periods of stability, the paradigmatic extension is the main form, with the genres enlarging their connotations.

It is not strange that in the literature of the reorientation periods we often find a powerful "formalistic" tendency. Because during those periods, the development of literature is mainly an adoption of new forms.

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[8]Before the third century BC, the distinction between China Proper and the Barbarians was not clear, neither was the distinction between literacy and orality.

[9]Prof Stephen Owen's accusation ("What Is World Poetry", *The New Republic*, November 19, 1990, p. 28) that modern Chinese poetry is a poor imitation of Western Romanticism is one of the latest unfair judgement on modern Chinese literature by Western scholars.

16.7 Literati Genres

To absorb new genres or new forms into Chinese culture; it is essential to grant them sufficient meaning power. They have to become "literati genres". Without this change, they remain unassimilated, to be tolerated bur not respected.

Transforming a certain genre into a genre of the literari can be seen as a process of transfusing it with pre-textuality. Folk-songs of the seventh and eighth centuries remained a sub-cultural genre. It was the effort of Wen Tingjun and other poets in the anthology *Amidst the Flowers* that turned them into a new "literary" genre. The popular songs of the Jin and Yuan periods (twelfth and thirteenth centuries) remained outside Chinese culture until Ma Zhiyuan, Bai Pu and others made it a new genre of Chinese high literature. The Southern Opera of thirteenth and fourteenth centuries did not enter Chinese culture until *The Lute Song* (c. AD 1375) turned it into a new genre. Many scholars would protest loudly—today we know at least two hundred titles of early Southern Operas. But the printed texts of those plays in the thirteenth century or the First half of the fourteenth century were all lost. The dozen or so texts we can see now were all recently unearthed relics. If the texts of a whole genre are not preserved, we can only say that the genre had not yet entered into the highly literary-dependent Chinese culture.[10]

The May Fourth writers who began to use the vernacular in literature, earlier in this century, believed that they were making literature more accessible to the masses. They may well have been sincere in their efforts, yet what they actually did was to make the originally reader-friendly popular vernacular fiction much more difficult to read. Only after being accept for use in literati genre was the Chinese vernacular, originally a "vulgar tongue", made into *the* language of Chinese culture.

The process of privilege is also one of sinicization, during which the pre-textuality of Chinese culture is forced into the alien genres. We discussed the case of New Poetry in the last section. Let us now lake a look at modern Chinese fiction. Lu Xun, the writer who was most critical of Chinese culture, and Yu Dafu who was the First to propose that Chinese literature should "go to the world", are both extremely concerned with their pre-texts. The first piece of modern Chinese fiction, "The Madman's Diary" has an narrative frame written in classical Chinese; *The True Story of A Q* discusses the sub-genres of biography in the Chinese tradition, and finds that the present one does not fit into any of them. Both these two works can be seen as efforts to place modern Chinese literature within the Continuity of Letters. Many of the characters in Lu Xun's other stories are members of the former literati, who have had to readjust their positions in relation to Chinese culture since they find themselves thrown out of its power and meaning structures. Yu Dafu's intensely autobiographical protagonist,

[10]This rule of thumb is applicable only to certain periods of Chinese culture. Before she second century BC, many texts of mainstream culture were passed down orally. The lack of a fixed channel for the culture's texts resulted in textual chaos when literacy became the criterion, and led to the two thousand years dispute over Confucian scriptures between the Old Character School (who hold that the texts of Confucian canons inscribed in sixth century BC characters are the genuine texts) and the New Character School (who hold that those inscribed in the second century BC are the genuine texts as they had been orally passed down by generations of Confucian scholars).

while obsessed with Wordsworth, was perhaps even more possessed by the ghosts of Chinese poets of the last century.

Indeed there was little realism of any sort in May Fourth Fiction. In contrast with the late Qing fiction (1902–17), May Fourth fiction (1918–27) cook a huge step back from political and social realism. It might even be said that while late Qing fiction was still concerned with the Continuities of Rule and Truth, May Fourth literature was concerned more with that of Letters.[11]

Therefore, May Fourth literature is what I call pure literature, which arises only in a period of cultural reorientation.

16.8 The Function of the Counterculture

The independence of Letters is especially important in periods of cultural reorientation, when the criticism of pre-textuality becomes a central issue for the survival of the culture.

Generally speaking, in periods of stability, the adjustment of the signification system is mainly a defense of pre-textuality, while in reorientation periods the adjustment of the signification system often assumes a subversive position, since the new codes of the signification system can only be built on a criticism of pre-textuality. So long as the reorientation is not yet complete, a critical examination of pre-textuality is the focus of the activities of Letters.

This subversive attitude gives literature a strong counter-cultural inflection during periods of reorientation. A portion at least of men of letters are intentionally violating the social norms: their gatherings of students and propagation of ideas in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, their "pure conversation" and "unruly and unrestrained" behavior in the Six Dynasties period, their frequenting of popular theaters in the Southern Song and Yuan period, and their megalomania during the May Fourth period. All these manifestations of personal behavior, intentionally eccentric, are meant co challenge the norms. Naturally, these people's re-examination of pre-textuality often poses as a total rejection of traditionalism.

We have to understand that this pose of rejection is more a metaphor than a discursive statement. The best example is Lu Xun's claim that Chinese history is a history of "man eating man", a claim that excited the whole May Fourth generation. Since Chinese history was considered more civilized than the history of any other nation, Lu Xun's statement can only be seen as a devastating metaphor, a challenging pose, a signal of his hatred of the dark side of Chinese Culture.[12]

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[11] This attitude was drastically changed around 1925. Lu Xun, the leading May Fourth writer, and a firm opponent of "Revolutionary Literature" began to be involved in political disputes, and by the end of that year, he stopped writing fiction for good.

[12] Lu Xun himself was aware of this metaphorical nature of his criticism of Chinese Culture. When commenting on the "anti-ritual" tendency among the men of Letters of the Wei-Jin period (AD 3rd to 4th c.) he pointed out, "Those who upheld the Rites were actually destroying them. They in fact

Similarly, we have to view the notorious "wholesale Westernization" of the May Fourth as a counter-cultural metaphor, a special mode of pre-textual criticism. Indeed Westernization in modern times bears a striking resemblance to the influx of Buddhism during the Six Dynasties. In the fifth and sixth centuries, Chinese culture was overrun by Buddhism to the point of turning the whole country Buddhist, something which worried many who believed that Chinese culture would be totally swamped up by the alien religion. Since there was nothing farther from Confucianism than Buddhism, this fear was taken very seriously, and many died in order to "save the nation". What does history then show us? Buddhism was sinicized by the seventh century, and both greatly enriched and was greatly enriched by Chinese culture.

Nevertheless, in order to preserve the metaphorical nature of cultural criticism, literature has to stay within the sphere of Letters, that is, to remain "pure". Because, we have to understand, counter-cultural criticism only provides a *possibility* of cultural reorientation. To use the words of the May Fourth writers, it is diagnosis without prescription, let alone cure.

Viewed in this way, counter-culture cannot be judged as a success or a failure. In fact it is destined to be failure, because its subversive power is only metaphorical. The direction of the counter-culture is never the eventual direction adopted by mainstream culture after the reorientation. If Buddhism had become the real direction of Chinese culture at the time of the Six Dynasties, Chinese history would have been cut into two scarcely connected halves, as Islam divided the history of many Middle-Eastern nations.

The often-heard accusations: "pure conversation ruined the Jin Dynasty", or "Buddhism and Daoism ruined the Liang Dynasty" are all politicians' scapegoating. In the 1950s many in Taiwan accused Hu Shi, the pioneer thinker of the May Fourth Movement, of "losing China". In the last twenty years there has been a view shared by many Chinese scholars, especially those residing in the West, that the May Fourth criticism of Chinese culture is shallow and harmful. I believe that: these accusations all come from a misunderstanding of the historical role of counter-culture.

16.9 New Wave Sensibility Is the Sensibility of Reorientation

After all these arguments we can now come back to our topic of Chinese literature. "Pure literature" is not art for art's sake. Any signification is inevitably a social activity. No literature can be totally detached from society and culture in general. The obsession of pure literature with itself should be understood as mainly a disguised concern with the pre-textuality of the culture.[13]

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did not believe them. Those against the Rites were in fact recognizing the Rites and believing in them. [Their negation of the Rites] was only a pose." (*Lu Xun Quanji*, Beijing: 1981, vol. 3, p. 513).

[13]The forum chaired by Zhu Dake on Chinese Avant-garde Literature in March 1989 seems to represent a high point in the understanding of the New Wave by Chinese critics and writers. Anyway,

Contemporary Chinese literature began to discard the role of political and propagandist tool at the beginning of the 1980s. Yet its main concerns remained utilitarian, as in the early 1980s Chinese literature was still trapped within immediate social concerns. It was not until the post 1985 New Wave that Chinese literature regained the spirit of cultural criticism it assumed during the May Fourth period, and became concerned with Letters alone.

New Wave literature, in its brief history of five years, has shown various characteristics typical of literature during a period of reorientation—its counter-cultural "total subversion" (Can Xue's *The Muddy Street*, Liu Suola's *You Have No Choice*), its stubborn antagonism against existing norms (Wang Anyi's *The Century on the Hill*, Han Shaogong's *Dad Dad Dad*), its unsparing ridicule of any existing value system (Ye Zhaoyan's *The Dusk of May*, Duo Duo's *The Last Song*), its impulse to Find values outside the mainstream culture (A Cheng's *The King of Chess*, Mo Yan's *Red Sorghum*), its strong disbelief in any control of signification (Yu Hua's "Bloody Plum", Su Tong's *The Escape of 1934*), its resignation to the inevitable tragedy of the individual in the society (Shi Tiesheng's "Fate", Ge Fei's *The Lost Boat*), its esoteric and bizarre style (Sun Ganlu's *The Letter from the Postman*, He Liwei's "The White Bird"), etc.

The comparison between New Wave fiction and pre-1985 "Wound Fiction" is very similar to that between May Fourth fiction and late Qing fiction. The New Wave keeps a distance from reality. Even the Reforms which concern everybody in China, or the Cultural Revolution that no one can forget, are now placed in the distance, as can be seen in such works as Yu Hua's *1986*, or Ge Fei's "A Trip to Yelang". In these works, social reality is only the vehicle of a metaphor.

And, while handing over the task of entertaining the masses to popular literature, and that of educating the masses to "Reportage" literature, it has willingly jettisoned the power to cause a popular sensation. Its persistent formal innovation has diminished its readership. It has been turned into the privileged literature of an élite.

Behind the kaleidoscopic features of the New Wave fiction, there is an obvious shared sensibility, or guiding principle, which the New Wave writers themselves may not be aware of—they are writing the kind of pure literature needed for cultural reorientation. Its critical spirit seeks to cause a rupture with the pre-textuality of Chinese culture, a temporary vacuum of values, through which the immense pressure of the cultural reorientation may surge in a new direction.

Such a sensibility can not be a mere fashion borrowed from elsewhere. Alien culture can provide Chinese literature with a few new forms but not with the sensibility of cultural reorientation.

This is a genuine, not a bogus, modern sensibility, because it is summoned forth by this entirely modern period of cultural reorientation. Whether the laurels of modernism or post-modernism suit it best is of lesser importance.

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it was the last published critical effort to interpret the movement. At least, Sun Ganlu suggested that the Avant-gardists should take the lead in withdrawing from the national arena (*Shanghai Wenxue*, 1989, no. 5, p. 45). Such desocialization of Avant-garde literature denies the cultural meaning of Avant-gardism, reducing it to the isolated preferences of some individuals…

Chapter 17
The Poetics of Death

This essay was written in November 1993, almost immediately after the tragedy. I would prefer not to make any alterations (eg. in the light of the availability of Gu Cheng's works and Gu Cheng criticism) so as to retain the feeling of the moment.

He who follows Dao… is entitled to kill, to kill himself, and in fact to do anything, as he is actually engaged in doing nothing.
—Gu Cheng, Speech Made at the Conference of World Cultures and Philosophies, Frankfurt am Main, 1992

1.

This is bound to become the mistiest page in the history of "misty poetry". Literary history will lose its way in its truths, its rights and wrongs.

If one reads Gu Cheng's writing sufficiently carefully, one comes to an inevitable conclusion, stranger even perhaps than the way he ended his own life: Gu Cheng had been laboring to build a blind alley, an alley that could lead to nothing but death, while the meticulous and refined labor he devoted to it, in poetics and in philosophy, could only make the end more demoniac.

Perhaps we would rather see him stop at the point he chose than see him at the age of fifty, still wearing his celebrated "chimney-pot" hat made from a jeans leg, preaching "poetry pursues childhood"—what else could we expect anyway except that there had to be a victim.

2.

To poetry, to himself and to the world, Gu Cheng could be said to be extremely consistent, in all the fifteen years or so of his career as a poet. If there were some minor inconsistencies that could be found here and there, it was his casting off of the residual influences of others.

Gu Cheng was born to be a poet. His casual talk sounded like poetry. It was said that he had already written almost ten thousand poems by 1986. At that time, many friends were quite puzzled that, being an established poet, Gu Cheng was willing to let his works be published in any and every local magazine. Gu Cheng explained: "Well, I don't care where my poems are published so long as I get paid and can go to

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Y. Zhao, *The River Fans Out*, China Academic Library,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6_17

Shanghai to see Xie Ye". Reputation and other considerations were not his concerns in writing in the first place. I dare say that he was, among today's Chinese men of letters, the one with the weakest ambition for fame and riches.

For someone like him then, was it necessary to go and live on a sparsely populated island? What was he trying to hide from? If amid the confusion of daily life, he had been able to follow his heart, what was the point of going to a desolate island "to purge my heart", or "to purify myself starting from the basics". If he remained so unperturbed in the noise of the modern metropolis, why should he go to such a hermit's lair?

The hermit life-style was itself an indication of the fundamental paradoxes in his life. He left Waiheke temporarily, and seemed quite scared of going back. He prolonged his stay in Europe but went back eventually. Two weeks after his return, he found himself at the end of his alley.

3.

There are several contemporary Chinese poets who are really good at speaking, but Gu Cheng's speech, and his love of speaking, had no equal. The audience could be as few as a couple of friends or a whole auditorium; it did not seem to make much difference to him. He could go on and on, enchanting everyone. He did not have the intention of monopolising the podium. But when the measures of the Beijing dialect were flowing from his lips, there were few who wanted to do anything else except listen.

Gu Cheng was in fact not the common type of arrogant poet who despises the audience and refuses to write for them. The more enchanted the audience was, the more lively his talk became—about his childhood, about his initiation into poetry writing, about his life on that tiny island, and more than anything else, about his poetics.

None of the ten Chinese poets who toured Sichuan in 1985 can forget the mobbing by the frantic fans and the thrill, which, in today's China, only pop singers enjoy. Gu Cheng couldn't forget either. He took much pleasure in describing his anger when he had to hide under a table in a house besieged by fans.

"At first the leading cadres of the 'Beijing Writers Association' just couldn't help looking down upon me", said Gu Cheng, laughing, "Soon they changed their minds when they discovered that there wouldn't be any headaches about travel or accommodation arrangements anywhere in China so long as they took me along".

4.

In the summer of 1992, I went to Central Europe for a vacation trip. Gu Cheng wrote to me from Berlin telling us which bus route I should take when arrived at the airport and where to switch to another bus, what stop to get out at for his house etc. On the makeshift map there were tidy street names in German. I was quite puzzled: Was this the same Gu Cheng who claimed that he was bound to get lost in any city if Xie Ye was not with him?

He had many admirers, but proportionally fewer in one particular circle—his fellow male poets: non-misty poets, misty poets, post-misty poets. It was not all

because of the time-honored rule of "people in the same trade despise each other". Quite a few poets insist that his never-growing-up was posturing.

Maybe they are right. Maybe the "wayward child" was Gu Cheng's game. Maybe the waywardness of Jia Baoyu, the celebrated lover in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, was a game too, which means that the player could give up the game: under sufficient pressure, and be remoulded. Doesn't Jia Baoyu give up and become a monk? But what if Gu Cheng could play only one particular role and was simply unable to switch, could we still call it posturing?

5.

In Berlin, he talked and talked, often late into the night. Xie Ye was fond of talking too. When she was present, the two fought to talk, mimicking all kinds of famous and infamous personalities which made us bend double with laughter.

But more often than not Xie Ye returned home very late. It was said that she was studying day and night, learning German, computing and what not. The great appetite Xie Ye showed in learning made us feel strange. When she was not present, Gu Cheng still kept on talking to us for hours but often went into some things hidden deeper in his mind.

6.

The girl's name was Li Suhua, a Vietnamese Chinese. She left Saigon on a boat, met with pirates and storms, and stayed in a refugee camp for long months before eventually coming to Germany. In 1987 when Gu Cheng and Xie Ye visited Germany, Li, studying in the Chinese Department at Trier University came to serve as their translator. Miss Li seemed to be indifferent to a career. In her dorm there was hung a scroll of her calligraphy: "Half beast, half god…" When asked what she would be doing after getting a degree in Chinese, she answered: "No aim other than getting married and raising children". A girl who can talk about the torment and the threat of death with equilibrium, and, though so brilliant, cherished no ambition, moved Gu Cheng very much.

The girl left such a deep impression on Gu Cheng that when he was in Germany again in 1991, he asked friends in Trier to find her, but no one knew her whereabouts after graduation. Having told us the girl's story, Gu Cheng looked dejected.

At that stage we knew nothing about what Gu Cheng was to write later in *Ying'er*. Hong Ying was an old acquaintance of *Ying'er* and knew that she went to New Zealand with the help of Gu Cheng and Xie Ye. She did ask about her but got some mumbled words as a reply and naturally she did not press for an answer. That summer, in 1992, *Ying'er* had not yet "eloped" and the storm was gathering only beyond their vision.

7.

All the pieces in Gu Cheng's *Stories and Pictures of Waiheke Island* (1992) are hilariously childish, with only the last piece an exception, which was devoted to Li Suhua. It is sombre and despondently metaphysical. "It was long after, when I started

dwelling in the 'red chamber of the South Sea' that I came to realize that girlhood is the purest land in paradise, knowable, visible, comprehensible, and decisive".

"Pure land in paradise", the highest order of "natural philosophy" could only be found in a girl whom he had seen only once and could not find any more. But in his "red chamber of the South Sea", in his almost melodramatic triangular romance later revealed in *Ying'er*, each girl has her charm and her disagreeable side. Where, after all, was the "eternal feminine" that led our poet above? She only flickered through his imagination. No wonder he had to write a meticulous, almost hair-splitting fastidious analysis between "girlhood", "womanhood" and "maidenhood".

And his eyes were downcast when he said to us: "Xie Ye has never, never even once, said to me 'I love you'". Well, if a woman is supposed to play the role of mother, you can't expect her to play lover as well.

Gu Cheng couldn't want more than to be a girl himself in his next life and as a girl he must be living in the "pure land of paradise". He couldn't suffer his own irrelevance.

One morning while Hong Ying was talking with Xie Ye in the kitchen on some women's topics, Gu Cheng ran in, waving a piece of paper in his hand, "See, I drew a fairy". Xie Ye was indeed annoyed: "Would you please leave us alone?"

8.

It was said that he started writing poems when he was twelve years old, that means he wrote for twenty five years before he died. I have not yet been able to find all his works. Judging from the few selections of his "childhood poems" up until 1983 when he was twenty-seven, all those poems seem to have flowed naturally from his heart without the mediation of language. Some of them, "Black Eyes" for instance, had political meanings read into them; some others, "Close Clouds" for instance, were given philosophical meanings. Had they not been picked out by editors (who are the true history-makers), I'm afraid that Gu Cheng might not be thought of in those terms.

But the years between 1983 and 1986, I believe, were the golden years in Gu Cheng's career as a poet. His poems written in this period were as simple as before in terms of his use of language, but in fact so simple that they discourage interpretation. One can feel that behind each poem there was a bizarre piece of drama which allows their audience only brief glimpses, as they appear very fragmented, especially the group of poems, under the heading of "Eulogy Worlds" which have never been collected. The "story" in between the few lines could be so horrifying that it sends a thrill down my spine every time I try to pry behind.

The year 1983 was a turning point for almost all "misty poets": Yang Lian and Jiang He turned to "roots-tracing", Bei Dao to metaphysical profundity. No one has yet mentioned Gu Cheng's turning. I sometimes think that only the works by Gu Cheng in these three years are truly "misty poetry". Other than these, it is more often than not a misnomer.

But why was 1983 the beginning? I can't say for certain. But that happened to be the year when he got married. He murmured that evening, "I had thought that marriage was heaven". It turned out to be….

9.

Then why was 1986 the end? That was more than obvious. In 1987 Gu Cheng and Xie Ye were invited to visit Europe—his first trip abroad. They returned for a short stay in Beijing and went to New Zealand, and he later gave up his teaching position at the University of Auckland to settle on the small island of Waiheke in Auckland Bay. Starting from this time his style had a "turning-back", back to childishness.

This periodisation may sound a little too strict. In his Chinese-German bilingual collection *Quicksilver* published in 1990, there are some poems composed in the last few years of the 1980s which still betray traces of "Eulogy Worlds". Even in these poems, however, the change of style is quite visible. Let me pick two at random:

Wolves

The tin that can be opened
Light inside:
Its shadows on the inner wall
A corridor, now lit now dim
Someone let down her hair

Birds

There aren't many birds in the village any more
No, not many
Strolling out
Here they are, in the village
And outside the village

The accepted interpretation of the former is intellectual, even though the language is simple and figurative; the latter reads very similarly, but is almost an example of poems of "no depth, nor connotation". It does not warrant reading metaphysical meaning into it, as people do with "Close Clouds".

In his last few years, Gu Cheng's poems were full of onomatopoeia, non-words, nonsense words and pre-lingual sounds-in-nature, which made his works more childish than ever before, jocular, indulgent, but almost indecipherable. That was his response to the sophistication of Western culture he had to face.

To this kind of radical reaction, Gu Cheng had to offer a self-defense. His last years were also a period when he was almost obsessed with poetics and philosophy.

10.

Nature is Gu Cheng's name for God. The word "nature" in Chinese is made up of two syllables and no one has ever split the disyllabic word. Gu Cheng insists that this word should be analyzed by each syllable: Zi, Self and Ran, Manner—Zi is the ontology, Ran is the possible approach. Therefore, a philosophy based on nature (*Ziran*) is a sufficiently valid ontology, which unifies everything and leads to "the primary and ultimate unity…well above being and not being".

But why, after all, should Gu Cheng want to find an ontological support for his poetics since he refused to allow any methodology and reasoning process?

In Laozi's *Daodejing*, Nature, though reigning supreme, is in fact *the Ultimate Reduction* in method: "human beings seek law from the Earth, the Earth from the Heaven, the Heaven from the *Dao*, the *Dao* from Nature". Nature is then the final goal of human beings, achieved through self-discipline, and therefore not their original state. Later Zen Buddhists and Neo-Confucianists, though claiming that Buddha or the *Dao* is nowhere but in one's own mind, all agree that it is necessary to clear away the inevitable wrapping or to get rid of the camouflage, and, in order to achieve this, self-cultivation is indispensable. In poetry writing, the state of Nature is to be achieved through tempering the language. Anyway, it is the end of the process, not the starting point.

For Gu Cheng's poetics, however, there is no place for method or for process. "With no reliance, nor dependence, nor coverage, nor even mind, thus everything is in agreement with nature",[1] because "the beautiful and the ugly all exist by themselves in nature".[2]

His is an interesting proposition, but a little too simple as the foundation of a poetics.

11.

From the height of this "naturalist philosophy" Gu Cheng could now reaffirm his claims of the early 1980s: "The language of poetry is nothing but the language of Nature",[3] which sounds like the grunting of pigs, or the swishing of swallows' wings, anything but the way city people speak in which there is "too much order". The critics in the cities were even more intolerable bores. "They talk about how trees are swaying, how green they are, but refuse to-feel the wind", thus what they churn out could only be the product of the "alchemist's oven", "everything professionalized", "like examination papers".[4]

Hearing Gu Cheng's outbursts of accusations, it is not difficult to imagine what kind of mood he would put me in as a critic. Fortunately, I was delighted to be an observer. For it was not only critics who were targets of his accusation, the poems written by "city" poets, of which he was one, were despised too.

Poetry can hardly be the language of Nature, because language itself is not natural. "To name" or "to speak" is the main culprit in the destruction of Nature.

Gu Cheng seemed to know the basic contradiction in his argument: "My life in the city for the last ten years has been pathetic. I am like a specimen insect pinned on a board, with my limbs waving helplessly, which means I have been barely able to struggle along as a poet".[5]

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[1] Gu Cheng, "Speech at the Conference of World Cultures and Philosophies at Frankfurt-am-Main", July 1993, *Press Freedom Guardian*, October 19, 1993.

[2] Gu Cheng, "Letter to the Editor", *Today*, No. 3, 1992, 250.

[3] *Young Poets on Poetry*, compiled by May Four Society, Beijing University, Unofficial publication, 49.

[4] Gu Cheng, "Letter to the Editor", *Today*, No. 3, 1992, 250.

[5] "Speech at the Editor's Meeting of New Wave Poetry", June 1986, *Bulletin of Beijing Writers' Association*, No. 2, 1986.

Being a poet is not something natural to life.

12.

In 1987, Gu Cheng changed course, as mentioned before in this essay, and made a statement to keep himself apart from the rest of the "misty poets": "Some of them have returned to culture, some of them prefer to stay outside culture, in Nature"[6] The latter category comprises himself, alone.

"Misty poetry" had never been non-culture and can hardly be said to have "returned" to culture, and Gu Cheng himself had never stayed "outside culture". In fact not long before, in 1984, he was still saying that when he was reading Whitman, "the bitter electric flow melts down the lead case".[7] He also declared, with more pride, that in his breath, "the long gale of poetry that has streamed through all the dynasties is still blowing".[8] Gu Cheng should have described his about-turn like this: "Some have returned to Nature outside culture", if we could suppose that he started as a "child poet" close to nature.

So he provided confirmation of my suggestion that the year of 1986–87 was his turning point. Just when he was at the peak of his career as a poet, he wanted to turn back. The reasoning of others is a nuisance; his own reasoning is even more of a nuisance. "What those who support Dao are to do is not to add to knowledge but to reduce conception".[9] From now on, poetry was something one was born to, something one acquires without learning, without cultivation and with no contamination of culture.

13.

And Gu Cheng suggested an even stranger way to achieve this Dao/Nature, which the Daoists hope to access via "non-action" (*wu wei*), whereas Gu Cheng offered to reach it with "no disallowed action" (*wu bu wei*). In his last few years he seized every opportunity to talk about "no action disallowed".

At first he used the term in the sense Zhuangzi did, mainly describing the freedom of the poetic imagination. At that time he already saw it as a way of returning, since freedom of imagination could bring him back to "the state of many years ago".[10]

Later, however, "no disallowed action" became a kind of practical irrationality, an ethics devoid of principle. "My way is nothing else but Heaven's way. Since I was born natural, whatever I do is in agreement with Nature". Thus, Gu Cheng, who used to be scared of culture, found a weapon to fight back. "The one who regards

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[6]"An Outline for the Speech Delivered at the British Association of Chinese Studies", 1987. Unpublished Manuscript.

[7]"A Few Remarks", Appendix to the Collection *Heiyanjing* (Black Eyes), Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1986, 203.

[8]Ibid. 205.

[9]"Speech at the Conference of World Cultures and Philosophies at Frankfurt-am-Main", July 1993. *Press Freedom Guardian*, 19 October 1993.

[10]"Speech at the Forum on New Wave Poetry", June 1986, Unpublished manuscript.

everything as equal suddenly turns lawless and thus fearless".[11] And he had two role models which he praised constantly. One is the magic Monkey in *Pilgrimage to the West*—Gu Cheng, born in the year of the Monkey, thought he might also be able to have the seventy-two metamorphoses; the second is Mao Zedong who dared to smash all culture with the Cultural Revolution.

But how was he to practice "no action disallowed" on the small island of Waiheke?

Perhaps it was just because he lived on a hermits' island that he could claim "no action disallowed".

It is true that in *Daodejing*, "non-action" is in juxtaposition with "no action disallowed". But Laozi obviously argues that non-action is the precondition of "no action disallowed", and "no action disallowed" is the end result of no-action. On the island he was in fact forced into non-action, "no action disallowed" was then his psychological solace more than anything else.

This isn't hard to comprehend: When feeling powerful (surrounded by admirers, for instance) Gu Cheng would first think of how to go for non-action so as to calm down.

14.

On the evening of our visit, in the quiet house in the west end of Ku'damm in Berlin, after hours of talking, Gu Cheng suddenly burst out: "Sometimes I just can't hold myself back—I want to burn! I want to kill!"

He was applauded and smiled at. No one was taking him seriously, a poet intoxicated with words? Yet looking at his eyes, I came to see that he had an uncontrollable dread.

"The Chinese *Zhengren* (genuine natural men) can also be regarded as devils".[12] Genuine Natural Men can do anything.

If genuine nature exists in everyone's mind, then everyone can be a devil, and those who take human mind as natural are indeed disciples of the Devil.

If Gu Cheng had known all that so thoroughly, he would not have been so full of dread. The world he faced was too real for him. He had to earn his living by raising chickens because poetry did not sell; he had to lean to drive or he couldn't move around; he had to learn an alien tongue or he would not be able to manage daily life. If his mother tongue was not natural, a foreign language is of course much less so. In 1988 Gu Cheng declared that he would refuse to learn English. He seemed to be ready for a destructive defiance against the alienation of the world.

And he wrote in his poem: "I hand you the knives, you, my killers!"

The confrontation is too intense. His hand would slip. Sooner or later.

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[11] "Speech at the Conference of World Cultures and Philosophies at Frankfurt-am-Main", July 1993. *Press Freedom Guardian*, 19 October 1993.

[12] Ibid.

15.

So he had started his preparations long before. In his poems, death was a theme that ran all the way through. Death seemed to be the permanent embodiment of "childhood". Childhood is so lively, just because it refuses to decay into adulthood. Instead it marches toward a premature death, and turns into a fresher life.

"To be or not to be is not a philosophical question".[13] So Gu Cheng was no Hamlet. He is a Chinese "genuine natural man". Death is beautiful to him: with eyes shut, the world no longer existed, and "non-action" is now easily turned into "no action disallowed". Death solves all the paradoxes of life.

Killers
love
to bring along fresh deaths.

The word "love" takes a single line, and the grammatical ambiguity works remarkably well here. The beautiful poem, unfortunately, predicted something not in the slightest poetic. Though he had long been practicing death in his poems or in his imagination, he had no idea of how closely the paradoxes of life, the powerful complexities of the vulgar world, had been chasing him all the time, not letting him go for a moment, and finally struck him down with a most violent death. "Death is not that hard", the great historian Sima Qian said, "To face death is hard".

16.

This is not a predicament inherent in Chinese philosophies, neither in Daoism nor in Buddhism. Life is a baffling paradox, for sure, but each of those schools offers a set of ways of deliverance. Buddhism divides "this side" and "that side", bridging the gap with "awakening" which could be brought about by long years of meditation; Zen Buddhism reduces the toil required for the "awakening" to a momentary revelation, thus at least pushing aside the urgency of transcendence. Laozi emphasizes "being satisfied", asking people to be "at home with where you dwell, enjoy the customs of the people you stay with"; Zhuangzi suggests reconciliation, "Since you know you cannot do anything, then be at ease with it as if it is part of your life", and in face of all the problems of life one should remain "unimpassioned" to the degree that "neither liking nor disliking could harm your body".[14]

Thus ancient Chinese philosophers tried to separate speculative philosophy and practical living. Speculation (and poetry) could be liberalized, individualized, interest-free, free to the degree that it could "enter the six worlds and roam the nine continents, and go anywhere alone, and possess everything alone. The lone possessor is supreme". To retain this freedom, one has to take care that it is not applied to one's life.

Gu Cheng, however, never tried to distinguish between the two. Poetry was his only way of living, his only way of reasoning, and sole guideline for conducting

[13] Ibid.

[14] *Zhangzi*, Chapter Defuchong.

relations with other people. This makes him a "pure poet" rarely seen in modern China—someone who takes poetics as ethics.

He somehow knew the price all along. He constantly wrote about death, sang about death, in order, I suppose, to release the threat that had been accumulating in him. But he also knew that he was perhaps bound to wind up his poetics with death, as the final solution. Unfortunately he was not successful. At the last moment, reality seized him, and blew up his poetics of death in a savage way.

Isn't it Zhuangzi who said far away, "a myriad of differences are made by things themselves at their own request. Why should one be so angry?"

Chapter 18
The River Fans Out: Chinese Fiction Since the Late 1970s

The 25 years of the post-Mao era of Chinese fiction is divided into two distinct stages: the pre-1989 period, and the post-1989 period. If this division is true about almost everything else in China, it is especially true with literature. This is because literature had been used as a lethal weapon for political struggle by Mao before and during his regime, and this tradition, though strongly challenged in the post-Mao era, still lingers, though in very different forms now and much watered down. Even the recent trends of art for art's sake, or for the sake of entertainment, or for the sake of religious consciousness, could also be read as political gestures, and are indeed treated as such by Chinese literary officialdom, and also by Western China experts. Despite the fact that Chinese fiction has been highly politicized, this paper will examine, as much as possible, the development of fiction as an art. Only the artistic quality can support my argument that recent novels from China deserve not only more scholarly attention but also more reader appreciation than they have hitherto received around the world.

18.1 "Scar Literature" and After

The immediate reaction in fiction after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 was a stormy impulse to complain about the abuse of power and the unceasing suppression of intellectuals. Although still timid in naming Mao himself, the fiction produced when the high-handed political control was lightened a little in 1978 offered a long list of complaints that made critics soon speak of "Scar Literature" (*Shanghen Wenxue).* A generation of novelists, sometimes called the "Returned Generation" re-emerged from oblivion. They had been young idealists active in the 1950s, the prime years of Red China, but had been labelled "Rightists" in 1957 together with half a million other intellectuals, and sent to hard labour. Some had survived and now had another chance to demonstrate that they remained loyal to their idealism while their prosecutors were opportunist sycophants. The complaints in those novels were at first limited to the

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Y. Zhao, *The River Fans Out*, China Academic Library,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6_18

"Cultural Revolution" (in which, anyway, all Party cadres suffered too) but soon extended to all the Maoist years, and some even touched on the post-Maoist years.

A number of names were soon on everybody, slips in those exciting years when novels were keenly read by almost the whole nation and regarded as political weathervanes. Most influential among them were Wang Meng with *A Bolshevik Salute* (*Bu Li*), Zhang Xianlian with *Half of Man Is Woman* (*Nanren de Yiban Shi Nǚren*), Cong Weixi with *Red Magnolia under the Tall Wall* (*Daqiangxia de Hong Yulan*), Zong Pu's *Who Am I* (*Wo Shi Shui*), Gu Hua's *Hibiscus Town* (*Furong Zhen*) to mention but a few.

This trend caused great alarm among ideologues who, in the late 1970s and the 1980s, whipped up one after another punitive campaigns to snuff out "bourgeois liberalism", using a few novels, plays, or films as the "worst illustrations". But what Mao had been good at was not designed for his followers, who lacked his absolute authority. Each of those campaigns fizzled out in the face of the resistance within and without the Party. However, the tension gradually built up, which eventually led to the disastrous collision in 1989.

Later, some younger novelists took over the task of reflecting on half a century of revolution and went much further in condemning the cruelty that used to be regarded as a necessary part of history. Novels such as Tie Ning's *Cotton Stack* (*Mianhua Duo*), Zhang Wei's Ancient Boat (*Guchuan*), Ge Fei's *The Enemies* (*Diren*), Chen Zhongshi's *White Deer Plateau* (*Bailu Yuan*), carried on the retrospective re-examination much beyond the Scar Literature, by questioning the necessity of the excesses and injustice that had traumatized the nation. They did better, but recognized that the right to complain was won by their forerunners in the early days when the solid ice showed little sign of thawing.

Western influence was an undeniable feature, especially in the first stage, in the sense that no discussion on any school of the period can be complete without paying credit to its Western predecessors. Starting from around 1979, two Western names were on the lips of every reformist in the literary and artistic circles: Karl Marx with his "1848 Manuscripts" (his early humanistic notes "rediscovered" by European Marxists), and Jean-Paul Sartre with his brand of existentialism (which Sartre himself explained as "a kind of humanism"). With these two banners, there emerged the Second Enlightenment movement, the May Fourth Movement around 1919 being the first and unfinished Enlightenment. Reformist theorists, such as the former Party literature boss Zhou Yang, openly subscribed to humanist Marxism.

By the mid-1980s, however, both the admirers and the accusers of humanism were considered by the majority of the literary circles to be out of touch with the rapid development of Chinese fiction. If a kind of chronology truly expresses the reception of literary influence, we can see that literature in China in the 1980s rapidly ran through all the stages of Western literature of the second half of the twentieth century. The dominant influences on the successive trends of the 1980s were, if some simplification is allowed, the rebellious nihilism of J. D. Salinger, the local-colour of William Faulkner, the magic realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and the experimentalism of Jorge Luis Borges. In the 1990s, however, Chinese writers more or less shunned outside influence in an unconscious effort to return to tradition. Yet,

as we shall see later, all postisms have received a warm reception, and imitators of Jack Kerouac appeared around the turn of the century.

18.2 The New Waves

The year 1985 was the *annus mirabilis*, the sensational beginning of what was later called the "New Waves" (*Xinchao Wenxue*) in art and literature. The immediate post-cultural Revolution era was more or less ended (although its impact rumbled on and would perhaps never die away) and a new fiction began to take shape.

There were several cultural factors that contributed to the emergence of the new fiction. First, the Government withdrew its financial support of the publishing houses (even though still regarding them as part of the state apparatus when it wanted to), letting them make or lose money independently. This led to an inundation of pulp fiction imported from the West (mostly crime novels) or from Hong Kong and Taiwan of China (mostly romances), and eventually to an upsurge of homespun popular fiction.

At almost the same time there arose the genre of reportage, or "faction", that tried to discuss the cultural or political issues directly, not hiding behind fictionalization. It actually deprived fiction of its role as a socio-political mouthpiece. The tradition of admonishing the masses through fiction was gradually weakened although never quite finished. That does not mean that fiction stopped being political, only that the cultural politics involved in fiction could be less direct.

These two "new" genres greatly reduced the readership of Chinese literary fiction, but also enabled Chinese fiction to eschew the non-literary functions that had previously been forced on it, and to free itself from ostensible social and ideological pressure. Chinese fiction won the right to develop in its own direction.

The New Waves could be roughly divided into three actual "waves", although these are not to be seen as different stages—Stray Youth, Roots-Seeking, and Avant-garde (*Xianfeng Xiaoshuo*). The tides of all the three appeared more or less around the same time in 1984–85. They only ebbed in turn, giving the impression that they were successive tides.

Disaffected and rebellious urban youth, the former Red Guards, had featured in many works of Scar Literature, in novels about their life in the remote villages, where they were sent to be "re-educated" during the Cultural Revolution and subjected to humiliation at the hands of local cadres. Nevertheless, a kind of heroism was still needed to justify anger at the betrayal of their idealism. Novels by former "rusticated youth" such as Liang Xiaosheng *There'll Be Snow-Storm Tonight* (*Jinye You Baofengxue*) and Lao Gui's Blood Red Sunset (*Xuese Huanghun,* the author's penname was changed to Ma Bo in the English translation) are even more poignant complaints than those by their seniors.

Nevertheless, their fiction in the mid-1980s, mostly about their life after returning to the city, was much more individualistic. Now totally disillusioned, they defied any existing social norms, at least in fiction. *Hong Feng Going to the Funeral* (Ben Sang)

is one such novel that flaunts defiance but actually deplores the impossibility of any values. The protagonist is travelling to his father funeral, an event that is the saddest and the most solemn in Confucian ethics. He hates all the hypocrisy surrounding the event, but also sees his own baseness. He flirts with the girl who works the furnace where his father's body is being cremated, since the world is permeated with loneliness.

Stray Youth fiction seemed to reach its apogee with *Liu Suola's You Have No Choice* (Ni Biewu Xuanze) and Liu Xihong's *You Can't Change Me* (Ni Buke Gaibian Wo), both women writers. Hardly before had such a stubborn individualism been seen in Chinese fiction. The shock felt by Chinese reading these young women novelists' works could be regarded as the earliest definite sign of the awakening feminist consciousness in post-Mao China.

The heated discussion among intellectuals since the early 1980s on whether the Confucian cultural structure should be blamed for the retarded modernization of China finally turned itself into an artistic movement searching for cultural stimulation. The Roots-Seeking movement thus started was so overpowering that it engulfed all genres of Chinese art and literature in the mid-1980s and actually marked the birth of Chinese new film. Those authors went "beyond", to isolated pockets of ethnic minority culture still untainted by civilization; to Daoism, Buddhism and local Shamanism frowned upon by Chinese mainstream culture; and down to the peasants and mountain villagers who live by instinct rather than by prescribed ethics.

Roots-Seeking fiction first appeared in A Cheng's *King of Chess* (Qi Wang), Zheng Wanlong's series of novellas about the Oroqen hunter race on the Siberian border, Yang Zhengguang's *Old Dan Is a Tree* (Lao Dan Shi Yike Shu) and Zheng Yi's *Old Well* (Lao Jing) about the vigour in the simple life of mountain dwellers. But soon more serious players came on the stage, such as Mo Yan, whose *Red Sorghum* (Hong Gaoliang) series initiated a Dionysian saga of his home village "the gangster country". When asked where in China one could find his enviably brave and shame-free men and women, his answer encapsulates the true spirit of the movement: "They are nowhere to be found in China today, but they once lived on this land, and will live here again".

Nevertheless, some Roots-Seeking novelists were dissatisfied with romantic self-delusion, and found, in their search, quite the opposite to what they were looking for—the deterioration that inevitably befalls any society. Han Shaogong's *Pa Pa Pa* (Bababa) is a most surprisingly acute criticism of any process of civilization. In this way, Chinese novelists arrived at a more mature understanding of their own art.

18.3 The Avant-Garde

Almost all the active novelists of the avant-garde that emerged in 1986 had started as Roots-Seekers. What made their reorientation particularly interesting was that many of them were based in Tibet. Ma Yuan, a Chinese novelist writing about Tibet, and Trashi Dawa, a Tibetan writing in Chinese, were widely regarded as leading

figures in this group. This Tibetan obsession lingered on into the 1990s, with A Lai's charming novel *When Dust Has Fallen* (Chen'ai luoding, re-titled Red Poppies in the English translation). Others, such as the idiosyncratic woman novelist Can Xue, were also based far from the cultural centres. Because of this, avant-garde fiction was, at one time, regarded as the Chinese variant of magic realism. But the movement soon proved to be more ambitious than that.

Around the end of 1987, however, another batch of avant-garde novelists, all new names, made a spectacular appearance: Su Tong with *The Escape of 1934* (Yijiusansi Nian de Taowang), Ye Zhaoyan with *The Story of the Date* (Zaoshu de Gushi), Ge Fei with *The Lost Boat* (Mi Zhou) and Yu Hua with *One Kind of Reality* (Xianshi Yizhong). Most of these authors came from the economically advanced Yangtze delta.

What connected the avant-garde novelists with their fathers' generation—the Scar Literature writers—was the lingering memory of the Cultural Revolution. For the new generation this memory was vague, more chaotic than to be argued against, which actually enabled them to project the national trauma onto the screen of their own imagination. Even on those occasions when they wrote directly about this or that crazy twist of history, for instance Yu Hua in his *1986* (Yijiubaliu Nian), the experience of the Cultural Revolution seems to be pointing to something beyond the horrifying events of that particular tragedy. Yu Hua's later works in the 1990s, such as *To Live* (Huo Zhe) and *Xu Sanguan Selling His Blood* (Xu Sanguan Maixue Ji), continued the fable of cruelty and atonement, although more diluted in a realistic narrative.

What made this first avant-garde movement genuinely avant-gardist was their deliberate erasing any traces of intentionality. Almost all the Chinese novelists before them had a message to put across, forcing readers to share their interpretation of the text and the world at large. In sharp contrast, avant-garde fiction deliberately denies the reader any clue to an intended interpretation. Part of its charm lies in the titillating possibility of meaning and in the lack of its confirmation. The readers who would be mystified and thrilled by such enigmatic works as Ma Yuan's *Fabrication* (Xugou) or Can Xue's *Old Floating Clouds* (Canlao de Fuyun) were, naturally, more sophisticated than the average for, after being stunned by the jagged, fantastic narrative, they were forced to construct their own interpretation or to enjoy meaning in no meaning. Those novelists disdain of a wider readership would prove to be costly in the 1990s, although in the cultural atmosphere of the 1980s their works won the enthusiastic response of both readers and critics. Even film directors at the time competed to put such avant-garde novels such as Su Tong's *The House of Concubines* (Qiqie Chengqun, re-titled *Raise the Red Lantern* in the film and English translation), or A Cheng's *King of Children* (Haizi Wang) on the screen.

With the inception of the New Waves, Chinese fiction finally returned to where modern Chinese fiction had set out: the May Fourth fiction starting in 1917. Enthusiastically experimental in narrative technique, both intended to awaken the readers' consciousness to see the world for themselves.

18.4 Painless Entertaining

Even beyond the scope where the cultural officials have direct control, the general literary scene since 1989 looks very different from that of the 1980s, even though many of the same novelists have continued their careers. The main concern of the Chinese novel now seems to aim at market success by providing readers with entertainment—witty, clever, easy and painless.

The first and foremost apologists of this customer-friendly trend are Wang Shuo and Wang Meng. Wang Shuo is a young maverick novelist, once a successor of the Stray Youth school, who turned the airy negation of all values into something sellable around the turn of 1990. His 1988 novel Playing with *Heartbeat* (Wande Jiushi Xintiao) is a brilliant work of parody, while his 1990 novel *Please Don't Call Me Human* (Qianwan Bie Bawo Dangren) sails straight into melodrama. Now he plays the role of spokesman of the new commercial culture, pleasing consumers with his inexhaustible witticisms. He was the first well-known novelist to become financially successful by turning to commercial writing readily adaptable to TV. Hitting the nail on the head is his sarcastic remark: "Sure we are to 'serve the people', but businessmen serve the people better than anyone else, as the people is on their mind all the time".

Wang Meng belongs to the old generation. He was a leading novelist of the Scar Literature and former Minister of Culture in the last three years of the 1980s, the only minister who resigned after the 1989 incident, and is thus considered by many a hero. Yet in the 1990s he turned to endorsing the new trend of entertaining literature by "opposing the elitist, refusing the idealist, shunning the noble, and dumping all dichotomies" (i.e. reform versus conservatism, democracy versus autocracy, etc.). Like Wang Shuo, he is astonishingly frank in voicing his stance, perhaps in a more sophisticated manner but not more elusively.

Theirs is not at all a lonely voice among the elder generation and the younger generation of Chinese novelists. Another of the best-known Scar Literature novelists, Zhang Xianliang, is now a nouveau riche, a founder of a film-production base built in an area bordering the Gobi Desert.

If we remember that get-rich-quickly is now the Government's avowed policy, we can see that finally the majority of Chinese intellectuals, of whom the men of letters are the most unbowed section, are in happy agreement with the Party, which, anyway, has put into effect the long-awaited economic take-off.

Once more, a theoretical defence has been drawn from the West—this time post-modernism, which offers a sharp critique of everything associated with the concept of modernity. With the erudite exposition by such critics as Jean-Francois Lyotard and Fredric Jameson (who has been lecturing in China on postmodernism almost every summer since the mid-1980s), it seems to offer an alternative to cultural and political modernization. Therefore, what was once a powerful cultural criticism in the West has now been turned into an excuse to reconfirm the status quo and to leapfrog the messy modernization, with which the Chinese intelligentsia was so obsessed in the 1980s. In a similar manner, post-structuralism and deconstructionism have been

enthusiastically imported in order to dissolve the grand narrative of Enlightenment and post-colonialism and to support patriotic fervour.

18.5 Young Writers "Turning Inside"

In such a cultural turmoil, it was natural that some women novelists turned to look inward at all the mundane and commonplace aspects of their daily life. They started the "Private Chatting" novel (Siyu Xiaoshuo). Those novelists, mostly born in the 1960s, experienced the Cultural Revolution by seeing the vicissitudes of people's fate.

Chen Ran with her Sunshine inside *My Lips* (Zhuichun Lide Yangguang) and *Toast to the Past* (Yu Wangshi Ganbei), Lin Bai with *War of Her Own* (Yige Ren de Zhanzheng) and *Speak Out My Room* (Shuoba Fangjian) are regarded as representatives of the school. They bring out, in vivid episodes, the "privacy" in the depth of women's self-consciousness, thus retreating from the robust feminism of the 1980s. They present their heroines as "little women", or occasionally, "white collar" female employees in the cities' concrete jungles.

At the beginning of the new century, another generation of women novelists came to the fore—the so-called *New New Humankind* (Xinxin Renlei), younger women who were born in the 1970s and have no personal knowledge of the Maoist years and even hardly any memory of 1989. They are a new breed who grew up in the money-crazy 1990s and defiantly flaunt their banner of hedonism. In Mian Mian's *Candy* (Tang), Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby* (Shanghai Baobei), An Dun's *Absolutely Confidential* (Juedui Yinsi), Chun Shu's *Beijing Doll* (Beijing Wawa), Jiu Dan's *Crow* (Wuya) and *A Woman's Bed* (Nǚren Chuang)—the protagonists generally proceed from one bar to another, from one gig to another, and from one man's bed to another. Life assumes the resemblance of a never-ending disco party, as if tomorrow is not theirs. For the characters in these novels, there is no need to worry about such vulgar things as how to learn a skill or earn a living. This is definitely more a gesture than an observation of life, let alone quality art.

They call their fiction "alternative" (to the mainstream fiction), but since this kind of fiction and this style of life has received such a warm welcome among the Chinese youngsters of today, it is actually the chosen, not the alternative. Official critics frown at these young people, but they are in fact the true daughters of this materialistic age. These young people are only too eager to exploit the opportunity offered by the times and to bury art under the lava of pleasure. Wei Hui, certainly the best among them, not in writing but in sloganeering, sums up the true spirit of the trend when she says: "Let's dig into the restless lower belly of this Libidinous Generation!".

Some critics, Chinese and Western, have applauded what they call "the emergence of a Chinese Beat Generation". But where is the pursuit of the spiritual behind the Beatniks' antics? These youngsters today are staging the easiest rebellion in the world—gulping down as much pleasure as possible while arrogantly refusing to

touch any "big issues", not even the complications that the release of the "lower belly" is bound to lead to. Could Chinese fiction desire now to return to its infantile mirror stage?

However, it is not that there are no longer younger writers carrying on the Stray Youth tradition of disillusioned idealism. Ning Ken's *Masked City* (Mengmian Zhi Cheng), for instance, gives a moving portrait of a young man who stubbornly refuses opportunities of worldly "success" and prefers to live on the margin of the society. In Ding Tian's *We Who Feed on the City* (Siyang Zai Chengshi de Women) the narrator tells about the widely different fate—some in jail and others in clover—befalling buddies with their short innocent adolescence. These superior novelists make less noise, and, as a result, are not heard as much.

18.6 New Works by Established Writers

Many of the heavy-weights—those authors who established their reputation in the heyday of the 1980s and have been discussed earlier—were still consistently producing impressive works in the 1990s. But they have adjusted their style in order to fall more into line with the current taste of the reading public. The modification of their established style is not just an intentional yielding to the needs of the time, but rather a subconscious dilution of their idiolect.

Wang Anyi, the celebrated Shanghai woman novelist, who sent a string of shocks through the Chinese literary scene in the late 1980s with her daring depiction of erotic love and her staunch feminist stand, has now been more subdued in her tone. Most of her novels of the 1990s are devoted to the life of the common city dwellers of Shanghai, the never totally de-westernized city under its revolutionary cloak. Her novel *An Everlasting Regret* (Changhen Ge) melts the life in Shanghai into the pageant of calendar. The skilful narration of the moving story of a petty-bourgeois woman's ordinary, rather wretched life demonstrates convincingly a mature artist.

Another famed novelist, Jia Pingwa, who lives in the ancient city of Xi'an, used to find inspiration from his peasant origin and was thus considered a member of the Roots-Seeking movement. But his cultural roots are much deeper in the Chinese narrative tradition, which eventually influenced his novels on life in the city. His novel *The Abandoned Capital* (Fei du) is widely regarded as a work of "genuinely Chinese decadence". The sex-hungry male and female characters in the city do not look at all like the hedonists in the coastal cities, but more like the licentious burghers of Chinese erotic novels of the sixteenth century. Likewise, his pages are crowded with verbal brilliance that is untranslatable.

Li Rui is another novelist who established his name during the Roots-Seeking movement with his story sequence Stolid Earth (Houtu) about the unchanged peasants, life in the deep Taihang Mountains. His novella *There's a Golden Sun in Beijing* (Beijing Youge Jin Taiyang), about the tragic life of a village school teacher who suffers long imprisonment because of his overzealous obsequiousness, is told with overwhelming pathos. His recent novel *Old Town* (Jiuzhi, the English translation

was re-titled Silver City) is an account of the encounters of generations of revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries, all neighbours and relatives. The characters seem to have no control over where the torrent of history would carry them to, but whatever their fate, something cruel is lurking behind it, making everyone a victim.

None of these authors could hope to compete with popular novelists such as the female novelist Chi Li, whose works concentrate on the life of young urban people, especially on their romantic relations. Almost every novel of hers is a best-seller, written with such a dexterity that they are easily adaptable into TV mini-series, with each chapter rising to its own climax but all contributing to the ultimate suspense.

18.7 New Novelists of the 1990s

The portraits provided in the sections above might sound a little cynical. Since the early 1990s, there have been serious debates among intellectuals and also earnest artistic efforts by novelists, although their voices are hardly audible to the mass of readers.

Among the novelists who are in their 40s, the Rift (Duanlie) Group, whose members all live in Nanjing, is of unique interest. This seems to be the only group of Chinese novelists who still carry on with their variant of avant-garde—sometimes called post-avant-garde fiction. They were all formerly poets who made their names in the late 1980s with their "Post-Misty" style. In the 1990s they turned to fiction, knowing that writing poetry is now very much a narcissistic "kara-oke" art.

The one who first attracted scholarly attention in the early 1990s was Zhu Wen, who had started with brilliant Borgesian stories but turned to biting social satire. His novellas all have outrageous titles such as *I Love US Dollars* (Wo Ai Meiyuan), *Do the People Really Need a Sauna*? (Renmin Daodi Xu Xu Xuyao Sangna), *Beat Up All the Poor People* (Ba Qiongren Tongtong Da Hun), and *Fortunately We Now Have Some Money* (Xingkui Xianzai Youle Jige Qian). Among the Rift novelists, he is obviously most worldly wise and closest to daily life, but his works are far from realistic. In fact he attacks our self-satisfying conception of reality with such ferocious provocation that he threatens our peace of mind.

Han Dong, the unofficial leader of the Rift group, still persists in his metaphysical fiction. His collection *My Plato* (Wo de Bolatu) is a delight to readers who enjoy enigmatic narratives. The formal beauty of his works comes, paradoxically, from the chaos of accidents that topples all possible rationalism. It is indeed that yearning for a formal order that ties Han Dong's world together through frustrating occurrences. Now that Chinese fiction is shying away from any "grand narratives",his is perhaps the only way to find the trace such narratives left on the Chinese mentality.

Li Feng is another outstanding novelist of the group, even though he has already left Nanjing. His *Nobody Falls Asleep Tonight* (Jin ye Wuren Rushui) persists in its pursuit of beauty, which leads the narrative from the present to the deep past, making it vibrate in resonance.

There are other excellent novelists who do not belong to any group. Qiu Huadong, originally from Xinjiang but now living in Beijing, is a prolific novelist who often treats us with happy surprises. His latest novel *Confession at Noon* (Zhengwu de Gongci) is widely regarded as a roman a clef modeled on Zhang Yimou, the celebrated film director, and Gong Li, the most glamorous star. The elusive difference between reality and fiction leads to the exaggerated story where the director kills the actress before committing suicide. However, the novel is more than that, it is a picture of the awkwardness of Chinese art today—the mad chase for worldly success that makes artistic perfection a pipe dream.

I reserve an honorary mention for Li Er, the young Henan novelist and his Variations (Hua Qiang). In his usual style, he plays all kinds of ironic stylistic games on a deadly serious theme. The narrative is carried by three different persons in a kind of partially overlapping relay, in the manner of Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*. But the theme that careful readers could find in the end, when the true hero of the novel finally lets himself be seen, is are evolutionary intellectual tired of rhetoric and of power struggles. I am personally very impressed by the novelist's profound sense of historicity, something the "historiographic" Chinese culture can now hardly claim to possess.

18.8 Chinese Novel in the Diaspora

What should be considered a unique literary phenomenon of Chinese literature in the 1990s is the rise of Chinese diasporic literature, both in Chinese and in the language of the host countries, although the present paper will only mention some works written in Chinese.

The migration of Chinese artists to the West—mostly to North America and Australia, but also to West-European countries—started in the 1980s. The number of poets among them is disproportionately high for understandable reasons. There are, however, many novelists, most of whom tried to continue, but were forced to give up their career as writers under the pressures of survival. Indeed, only those novelists who had already established their reputation before going abroad would even have tried to continue.

A small number of them have not only survived but reached a new peak in their careers. The most productive among them are Yan Geling, based in the San Francisco Bay Area, and Hong Ying, in London. Yan Geling's novels of the mid-1980s are mostly based on her experience serving in the army in the remote Tibetan borderland, and she should be regarded as a Roots-Seeker. Her novels written in the US, however, are mostly about the life of the new Chinese-Americans like her. Her 1996 novel *The Mythical Land* (Fusang; the English version is re-titled *The Lost Daughter of Happiness*) weaves the legends of Chinatown prostitutes and coolies of the nineteenth century into present-day America. Another of her recent novels *No Exit Cafe* (Wu Chulu Kafei Guan) is a panoramic picture of the dilemma faced by the new immigrants.

Hong Ying, on the other hand, tends more to the fanciful. Her autobiographical novel *Daughter of Hunger* (Ji'e de Nǚer) was re-titled *Daughter of the River* in English, as the UK and US publishers were afraid that Western readers would be too squeamish. Indeed they have been shocked, if we believe the reviews, about the bitter growing-up of a girl in the city slums of a sprawling Chinese metropolis. Another novel by Hong Ying, *K* (re-titled K, the Art of Love in English translation) is based on the tragic affair between the British poet Julian Bell and a Chinese woman novelist; and the novel transmogrifies the pre-second World War life in China into something too desperate to be romantic. Because of its striking eroticism, the novel has been accused of "defaming the dead", and was embroiled in a drawn-out libel case in China. Her recent novels, such as *Ananda* (A Nan) and *The Peacock Cries* (Kongque de Jiaohan), have attracted critical attention because of their concern with global issues, which makes her one of the most cosmopolitan novelists of contemporary Chinese literature.

Major Novels of the Period Available in English

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Yu Hua (1993) *One Kind of Reality*, trans. Helen Wang, in The Lost Boat, ed. Henry Zhao (London: Wellsweep).
Zhang Xianliang (1986) *Half of a Man Is Woman*, trans. Martha Avery (New York: Norton).
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Chapter 19
The New Waves in Recent Chinese Fiction

The year 1985 marked a great turning point in the development of modern Chinese fiction—the beginning of what Chinese critics now call the "New Wave". The post-Cultural Revolution era had ended and an entirely new fiction was beginning to take shape. Critics began to recognize the trend and gave it the rather nondescript name "New Wave". Looking back, we find that, unlike other periods of modern Chinese fiction, it was pushed to center stage not by cataclysmic political events but by a gradual accumulation of cultural influences.

Firstly, there was the marked cultural stratification that was settling into place around 1985. Thanks to new policies implemented over several years, most of the publishing houses, though still part of the state apparatus, were no longer subsidized by the government. They were left to sink or swim in the market place. As far back as the beginning of the 1980's, the influx of translated Western detective novels was already irritating serious scholars and readers of literature. But it was reinforced by a flood of reprinted romance and martial arts novels from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Finally a upsurge of new home-produced popular literature—romance and crime fiction—deepened the inundation. By 1985 popular reading matter and pulp magazines had all but taken over the market place for fiction.

At the same time, reportage or "faction" (*baogao wenxue*) rose to prominence in Chinese cultural life and began to attract great attention. Topics such as the reform campaigns in rural and urban areas, sensational current events and controversial social issues were soon being dealt with as literary reportage, combining factual discussion and lively description. While most of those pieces showed full support of the official reform programme, some were more impatient. The most notable work in this genre was the script for the highly controversial and extremely influential TV mini-series *River Elegy* (*He Shang*) in 1987, a work with barely disguised political intentions, a hybrid of literature, scholarship and politics.

The emergence of these two kinds of literature severely reduced the readership of Chinese fiction. This caused a financial crisis but it also enabled Chinese fiction to eschew all the non-literary functions it had previously been forced to take on, and to free itself from social and ideological pressures. The shrunken readership

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Y. Zhao, *The River Fans Out*, China Academic Library,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7724-6_19

also became more elitist, consisting mainly of students. By distancing itself from the immediate social need of entertainment and edification, Chinese fiction had won the right to develop in its own direction.

In 1985 Chinese literary circles were excited and bewildered by a new fiction that would have been inconceivable in previous years. This work was written by hitherto unknown and sometimes previously un-published young writers. The successful debut of a whole generation of new writers inspired the term "New Wave Fiction" (*Xinchao Xiaoshuo*). Authors who had enjoyed a great reputation before 1985 suddenly found themselves unable to compete with the emerging younger talents, and minor writers who had managed to publish in the huge literature market now found themselves pushed relentlessly down-market into "pop" literature. Some critics now argue that truly modern Chinese fiction—able to hold its own in twentieth century world literature—did not emerge until 1985. Yet at that time no one had any idea of the tremendous changes which were taking place except for a few young men and women writing in the new manner.

The New Wave Fiction can be roughly divided into three actual "waves": Stray Youth Fiction (*Shiluodai Xiaoshuo*), Roots-Seeking Fiction (*Xungen Xiaoshuo*), and Avant-garde Fiction (*Xianfeng Xiaoshuo*). However, these are not to be seen as successive stages of re-cent Chinese writing. The earliest representative works appeared more or less simultaneously during 1984–85. Liu Suola's *You Have No Choice* (*Ni Biewu Xuanze*), Xu Xing's "Variations Without a Theme" (Wu Zhuti Bianzou), and Chen Jiangong's "Curly" (Juanmao) marked the inception of Stray Youth Fiction in 1985. A Cheng's *The King of Chess* (*Qi Wang*), and Han Shaogong's *Da Da Da* appeared in 1984 and 1985 respectively, launching the Roots-Seeking genre. While a few stunning pieces, such as Ma Yuan's novel *The Temptation of the Gangdisi* (*Gangdisi de Youhuo*), and Can Xue's story "Mountain Cabin" (Shanshang de Xiaowu) appeared in 1985, and represent the beginnings of the Avant-garde Fiction proper.

Though these three huge breakers of New Wave Fiction rolled in at almost the same time, their waters receded separately.

Frustrated but still rebellious urban youth features in works by such writers as Liu Suola, Xu Xing, Wu Bin, Duo Duo and in certain works by Hong Feng, Chen Cun, Wang Shuo, Chen Jiangong and others. On the surface, those works appear to develop the theme of individualism already seen in the fiction during the immediate post-Mao years, especially those on the life of "rusticated youth" (educated urban youth sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution for re-education). However, the two treatments take opposing stands on the issue of individuality in Chinese society. In the fiction of the immediate post-Cultural Revolution period an affirmation of individual values was strongly contrasted with the absurd extremism of collective pressures brought to bear on them by cruel political campaigns. A kind of heroism is needed for this type of social protest. In Stray Youth Fiction what we find is not so much a protest against society but a nihilistic defiance of any value system.

In his discussion of these authors, Liu Zaifu, the eminent Chinese critic, suggests that the following is their central concern. "They no longer appeal to society, nor

do they try to prove their values. They are now their own masters, seeking their own positions. Thus literature has passed from the stage of reflection to the stage of pluralistic search."

While fully agreeing with Liu's view that these works represent something entirely new in Chinese fiction, I doubt whether there is such an optimistic and confident note in the Stray Youth Fiction, or, for that matter, in New Wave Fiction generally. On the contrary, the force of their writing lies in their negation of everything, even the significance of their own existence.

> Maybe I am a ne'er-do-well, maybe.
>
> I'm not clear what I want apart from what I've got. What am I?
>
> What's more annoying is that I'm not waiting for anything.

This is the beginning of Xu Xing's "Variations Without a Theme", a shocking story about the impossibility of society's embodying any values. Hong Feng's *Going to the Funeral* (*Ben Sang*) is another typical case. Traveling to attend his father's funeral (in traditional Confucian ethics, the saddest and most solemn of events), the protagonist not only finds all kinds of hypocrisy surrounding him but also the signs of his own baseness. For instance, he makes love to a former girlfriend while his father is being cremated. This is a deliberate defiance of all values, even one's own personal values. The protagonist gives up any effort to search for anything as he sees clearly that the loneliness which surrounds him is impenetrable.

These authors are of the same generation as those who wrote about the lives of rusticated youth, but in the latter there is still anger after disillusion, after the betrayal of their passionately held idealism. For the stray youth now roaming in the city streets, there is no excitement or anger. The last shred of idealism has perished,

Stray Youth Fiction seems to have reached its apogee with Liu Xihong's charming short novel *You Can't Change Me* (*Ni Buke Gaibian Wo*), Hong Feng's *Going to the Funeral*, both published in 1986, and, during 1986–87, with Wu Bin's series of novellas *City Monologue* (*Chengshi Dubai*) in 1986–87. In these works a nihilistic negation of all values is pushed to its extreme. Afterwards, it was popularized as a melodramatic theme in the hands of a writer like Wang Shuo—*Leader of the Pack* (*Wan Zhu*, 1987), *Half Fire*, *Half Sea Water* (*Yiban Shi Huoyan*, *Yiban Shi Haishui*, 1988) *Playing Heartbeat* (*Wan de Jiusbi Xintiao*, 1988) *Watever You Do, Don't Take Me Seriously* (*Qianuwan Bie Ba Wo Dang Ren*, 1990). Wang Shuo's popularized variation on Stray Youth Fiction, with his playful virtuosity in urban slang and his indulgence in newly found sexual freedom, became a marvel of the market place in 1988 when three of his novels were filmed.

Roots-Seeking Fiction marks a more dramatic episode in the development of contemporary Chinese fiction. Around 1984 the Chinese academic world began a heated discussion on whether Confucian cultural structures were to blame for the repeated, humiliating failure of Chinese modernization during the previous hundred years. With vigorous promotion by many gifted young writers such as A Cheng, Han Shaogong, Zheng Wanlong, Li Hangyu, Zheng Yi and others, the years 1986–87 welcomed Roots-Seeking Fiction as a new, longed-for discovery. The new school of young writers went in a number of different directions to find their roots and

revitalize Chinese culture. They went "outside" the mainstream Confucian culture to isolated pockets of minority culture still untainted by civilization; or "sideways", towards Daoism and other religious cultures which were frowned upon by China's various orthodoxies; or "down", to the peasants and mountain villagers who lived by instinct rather so-called civilized norms.

For most of the Roots-Seekers, the fictional search for a solution was an unconscious manifestation of their frustration with the apparent impotence or infertility of Chinese culture. Yet this search looks rather like an escape, an escape from the social problems literature is supposed to help to solve, and an escape from the culture it is too exhausted to deal with. Such "roots", once found and assimilated, were supposed to serve as revivifying sources of energy badly needed by a senile Chinese civilization. This intention is clear in such works as Zheng Wanlong's series of stories about the shamanist Oroqen hunters; or Li Rui's sequence *Stolid Earth* (*Hou Tu*) about peasants deep in the Taihang mountains; or Hong Feng's story "The Prairie Song" (Bo'er Jinzhi Huangyuan Muge) about a journalist's romantic encounter with a Mongolian herds-woman whose boldness in love makes a miserable contrast with his civilized manners.

With this kind of escapism, romanticism is inevitable. Mo Yan was once asked where one might find the enviably brave and shame-free men and women of his *Red Sorghum* (*Hong Gaoliang*), and his answer was revealing. "They are nowhere to be found in China today, but they once existed, and will live in this land again."

Nevertheless, some Roots-Seeking writers were dissatisfied with this self-delusion, and found quite the opposite of what they were looking for—a process of deterioration that inevitably befalls any society, even imaginary ones. This can be seen in such Roots-Seeking works as Zheng Wanlong's "Yellow Smoke" (Huangyan) and Yang Zhengguang's "The Dry Ravine" (Gangou). But Han Shaogong's *Da Da Da* is the most surprisingly acute criticism of any process of civilization. The novel is a devastating exposure of some of the inveterate traits of Chinese culture—the absolute dichotomy of good and evil, and the propensity for collective cruelty. It is in fundamental contradiction with the author's stated intention that "literature should strike its roots deep into the soil of traditional culture". What he had actually written is a sort of uprooting fiction.

As far as the fiction itself is concerned, any chaos of theory need not be regretted, since it provides critical readers with much food for thought. The best works of Roots—Seeking Fiction are as thorough in their criticism of traditional Chinese culture as much writing from the first radical, short-lived period of Chinese modernism which accompanied the May Fourth movement from its inception in 1919. What is significant and relatively novel is the exploration itself. Whether work is entirely successful in its search for new, mysterious cultural roots is of secondary importance.

During 1987–89 the discussion of the nature of Chinese culture was taken up seriously by other circles—by philosophers, historians, sociologists and even political activists. There arose an intellectual movement dedicated to the re-examination of Chinese culture. Other art forms, most conspicuously cinema, began to achieve sensational successes by exploiting the Roots-Seeking themes, following the path

paved by the earlier fiction. Paradoxically, the widespread socio-intellectual favor dampened the enthusiasm for Roots-Seeking fiction. It ground to a halt by the end of 1987, and many of its authors took a definite turn in a new direction, toward avant-garde experimentalism.

The development of "Avant-garde Fiction" proper exhibits a different trajectory. The early authors of Avant-garde Fiction, Mo Yan, Hong Feng, Ma Yuan and the Tibetan writer Trashi Dawa, were, at first, regarded as part of the Roots-Seeking trend. In 1986, however, the newer writing distinguished itself and showed full stature with Ma Yuan's *Fabrication* (*Xugou*), Hong Feng's *Not Far from the Pole* (*Jidi Zhi Ce*), and Mo Yan's *Red Locust* (*Hong Huang*).

Alongside such terms as "Stray Youth", "Roots-Seeking", "Wound" and "Reform Fiction", "Avant-garde Fiction" seems out of place. The others are all named after their particular themes and subjects. In fact, the name is most appropriate. As Chinese fiction developed away from an emphasis on particular themes, the emergence of Avant-Garde Fiction as a distinct genre signaled a change in the rules of the game.

During its early development from 1984–87, most of the Avant-garde writers came from, or were based in, the more remote, marginal regions of China. Can Xue was from Hunan, Hong Feng from the North-east, and Mo Yan from the countryside of Shandong. Trashi Dawa was from Tibet, and Ma Yuan was also based there. The subject matter and exotic place names in these texts made them appear to resemble the work of the Roots-Seeking authors. Some Chinese critics concluded that modernism in China avoided the cities—perhaps because of the enormous pressures of "reality" in the latter. Instead, the new modernism sought out the backward and lethargic life of China's marginal towns which seemed to lend itself to the "far-out" mentality of modernism. This supposition soon proved to be premature. By the end of 1987, another generation of avant-garde writers, all new names, made a spectacular appearance: Su Tong with *The Escape of 1934* (*Yijiusansi Nian de Taowang*), Ye Zhaoyan with *The Story of the Date Tree* (*Zaoshu de Gushi*), Ge Fei with *The Lost Boat* (*Mi Zhou*) and Yu Hua with *One Kind of Reality* (*Xianshi Yizhong*).

Strangely enough, most of these authors are based in the industrially advanced Yangtze river delta—Su Tong and Ye Zhaoyan in Nanjing, Sun Ganlu and Ge Fei in Shanghai, and Yu Hua in Zhejiang. Perhaps it is no accident either that the young critics most ardently defending, the Avant-Garde Fiction are also based in this area, along with the three most important literary magazines—*Harvest* (*Shouhuo*), *The Purple Mountain* (*Zhongshan*) and *Shanghai Literature* (*Shanghai Wenxue*)—to have supported Avant-Garde Fiction.

Just as it proved dangerous to draw easy conclusions from the marginal-central and rural-urban dichotomies, we must take care in concluding that the capital, Beijing, has been slow to produce an avant-garde literature. Generally speaking, Beijing intellectuals have shown greater concern for immediate social issues. At the same time that the Avant-Garde Fiction arose, a New Realist Fiction (*Xin Shishi XiaoShuo*), much more successful with the reading public, has been being vigorously developed by Li Heng, Liu Zhenyun and others in and around Beijing, and also by the two female writers Chi Li and Fang Fang in Wuhan.

There is a very Obvious difference between the writers who established themselves before 1987 and the younger writers who emerged since. The pre—1987 authors belong more or less to the generation of the "rusticated youth" for whom the Cultural Revolution was a nightmare destined haunt the rest of their lives. This is obvious from, for example, Can Xue's *The Muddy Street* (*Huangni Jie*), Ma Yuan's *On the Level Up or Down* (*Shangxia Dou Hen Pingtan*), or Mo Yan's *Five Dreams* (*Wu Meng Ji*). Born in the 1960's, the younger writers are too young to remember a great deal about the Cultural Revolution which started in 1966. Even on those occasions when they write directly about the Cultural Revolution, for instance, Yu Hua in his ghastly story "1986" (Yijiubaliu Nian), the events of the Cultural Revolution seem to be pointing to something beyond the horrifying experience of that particular national tragedy.

The term "avant-garde" has, itself, a temporal aspect. The avant-garde of the past may be conventional today, and today's avant-garde is likely to be old hat some time in the future. However, this is where the name can mislead us. The term, particularly as it is used to describe this group of contemporary Chinese writers, indicates a socio-cultural mode of literary discourse, and/or a particular author-reader relationship. Just as the popular fiction of one hundred years ago may still be characterized as "popular" today, so avant-garde literature may be treated as "avant-garde" for years to come.

The current Avant-Garde Fiction is representative of the first truly avant-garde movement in Chinese literary history. Although in the 1930's and 1940's there were small groups of avant-garde poets, Chinese fiction writing was never inclined towards avant-garde experimentalism. Until the rise of recent so-called Avant-Garde Fiction, Chinese fiction had always centred on particular themes, and has tend towards the didactic, aiming to send a message by way of the text. The thematic intention might be utilitarian (Revolutionary Literature of the 1930's, Reform Fiction of the l980's), propagandist (Praise Fiction of 1950–78), reflective Wound Fiction of early 1980's), critical (Stray Youth Fiction), consolatory or reflective (Roots-Seeking Fiction). We might even say that all modern Chinese writers before the Avant-garde Fiction, despite wide-ranging differences, used a variety of means to persuade the reader to accept a "correct" interpretation of the literary text, and, consequently, of the world. The desire for the reader to share common assumptions is the aim of all these writers, although the degree of the exertion is different with different periods and groups. There is a prescriptive overkill in all high Communist Chinese literature (post-Yan'an when Mao Zedong in 1942 set out the guidelines for true revolutionary writing and also the subsequent Praise Literature) which categorically refuses the reader's right to individual interpretation, whilst the May Fourth and most New Wave Fiction allows the readers some room for alternative interpretative positions. We must remember that Chinese readers have long been taught to take note of the intentional context of any piece of writing. It has become natural for them to seek out and adopt the intended, prescribed or recommended interpretation.

In sharp contrast, Avant-garde Fiction deliberately denies the reader any clue to a "correct" interpretation. Part of its charm, especially for Chinese readers, lies in the play between the titillating possibility of intentional significance and the lack of

reliable guidance as to a "real" meaning. We may say that any "real" meaning of these narrative texts lies not simply in their content but also in the formal features of their narrative structures and strategies.

With the inception of the New Wave, Chinese fiction has finally returned to the point where modern Chinese fiction set out, to the fiction of the May Fourth period. Once again Chinese literature is strongly influenced by the discourse of an élite, with a strong counter-cultural aspect, a sharp critique of mainstream culture which nonetheless refuses to provide solutions for political or social problems. This literature serves as a corrosive, attacking the hard crust of the dominant culture.

The New Wave Fiction has also returned enthusiastically to the formal experimentalism of the May Fourth movement. In the fifty years before the Avant-garde Fiction arose, few Chinese authors made any further experiments in narrative form. This rediscovery of formal experimentation has highlighted the purely literary values of the New Wave Fiction and helped to make it worthy of the attention of Students and general readers throughout the world.

There is as yet no let up in the flow of Avant-garde Fiction works; it now seems to be widening into a flood and fanning out over a wide area. New authors such as Bei Cun, Yao Fei, Zhao Botao, Ye Shuming, Yue Ling, Yang Zhengguang and many others are joining in. Even the disastrous political tragedy of June 4th 1989 has done little to slow down the trend.

It is easy for western readers and critics to assume that the latest Chinese avant-gardism is yet another import from the West, like Coca-Cola and Discos. Some comments of this sort have already been made. I would urge western critics to take a fresh look at the evidence with an open mind. Certain influences must be acknowledged, such as that of Latin American fiction, especially Gabriel García Márquez, on Roots—Seeking Fiction; J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* was widely read and admired by Stray Youth Fiction writers, and a number of Borges' short stories have been influential since their translation into Chinese. Yet none of these influences can fully account for Chinese New Wave Fiction which, as I have tried however briefly to show, is the product of recent developments in Chinese cultural life, and the uncomfortable attempt to accommodate long-lived Chinese literary traditions in a modern and rapidly changing world. I am sure that the translations in this collection will surprise readers in the West, who will realize that, far from being imitations of one kind or another, these stories and short novellas are quintessentially Chinese, and could only be Chinese.

The selection was made with a view to offering in English some of the best Chinese New Wave Fiction. For this reason, literary value has been our primary consideration. There have been a number of compilations of contemporary Chinese writings. Regrettably, most scholars of contemporary Chinese literature still regard the work of Chinese writers as interesting chiefly for their sociological or political content. The very titles of these books (*Mao's Harvest*, *Stubborn Weeds*, *Seeds of Fire*, among others) reveal the underlying intention of the selections. While it is clear that contemporary Chinese literature has a sociological significance, it would be a shame if it were only ever read in this light. It would be particularly inappropriate when, as

I have tried to show in this introduction, a whole generation of Chinese writers have outgrown and set out to put behind them an overtly political or sociological mode of fictional discourse.

One purpose of this compilation is, then, to compensate for this tendency, to give readers a chance to see for themselves the literary qualities of some of the best recent New Wave Fiction. Examples of Stray Youth and Roots-Seeking Fiction have already been translated elsewhere for their sociological content. This selection will provide two further stories which fall into my categorization of Stray Youth Fiction, and three which I consider fine examples of Roots-Seeking. But the main part of the book will be devoted to three short novellas which are, in my view, landmarks of the nascent Avant-garde Fiction. It is my hope that this book will give some indication of the great a important changes taking place in the world of contemporary Chinese literature. I hope that it will demonstrate the unique contribution which Chinese writers are now making to twentieth century world literature, and that it will convince western readers and critics that if they continue to ignore this new literature, it will be their loss.